

BOOK

3

# 寻秦记

黄易

黄易精品



Huang Yi

A STEP INTO  
THE PAST

Blank Page

# **A STEP INTO THE PAST**

## **BOOK 3**

### **(Volume 11 to 15)**

*Author:*

**HUANG YI (黄易)**

*Original Title:*

**Xun Qin Ji (寻秦记)**

*Published by:*

**Wong Yi Books**

*Year:*

**2001**

*Englisht translation and electronic conversion for this Book 3 done by:*

**JUSTIN13, JEAN, and YEONGWEE**

*Published on:*

**spcnet.tv/forums**

*Date:*

**22 May 2010 – 18 August 2010**

*Compiling, editing, and formatting by:*

**jaran saga**

*Cover:*

Cover is modified version of original book cover.

*Remarks:*

Content of this ebook mostly is copied from the unabridged version posted by  
KOHCHUN.

..... the purpose of compiling,  
editing, and formatting this eBook is only for my  
private collection, for the love and eternity of "Cerita  
Silat" in Indonesia, and for providing those who don't  
have rupiahs much.....

.....this eBook is not  
perfect.....have comments or  
correction, please email me.....

Safar 1431H

Jaran saga  
jaran.saga@yahoo.com

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## VOLUME 11:

• CHAPTER 1	A Triumphant Return .....	1
• CHAPTER 2	Powerless .....	21
• CHAPTER 3	Lady Hua Yang .....	37
• CHAPTER 4	Exhausted .....	53
• CHAPTER 5	Analyzing the Situation .....	66
• CHAPTER 6	Panic .....	81
• CHAPTER 7	Pine Forest Ambush .....	97
• CHAPTER 8	An Earth-Shaking Conspiracy .....	115
• CHAPTER 9	Return To Xianyang .....	130
• CHAPTER 10	Highly Trusted .....	144
• CHAPTER 11	Meeting Qin Qing Again .....	159
• CHAPTER 12	Win-Win Situation .....	177

## VOLUME 12:

• CHAPTER 1	Internal And External Problems .....	197
• CHAPTER 2	The Death Of Zhuangxiang .....	218
• CHAPTER 3	Exposing The Plot .....	232
• CHAPTER 4	An Escape Trick .....	249
• CHAPTER 5	Grand Preparations .....	265
• CHAPTER 6	Before The Funeral .....	280
• CHAPTER 7	Deceitful Support .....	299
• CHAPTER 8	Jing Luo Canal .....	315
• CHAPTER 9	Conflict .....	330
• CHAPTER 10	Premier Residence Banquet .....	343
• CHAPTER 11	Each Having Their Own Plots .....	359
• CHAPTER 12	Heartbroken Over A Silk Painting .....	374

### **VOLUME 13:**

• CHAPTER 1	Prince Dan From Yan .....	387
• CHAPTER 2	The Stubborn Qin Lady .....	403
• CHAPTER 3	The Female Warriors .....	417
• CHAPTER 4	Feelings .....	432
• CHAPTER 5	A Well-Devised Plan .....	444
• CHAPTER 6	Shihuang Shows His Might .....	462
• CHAPTER 7	Hope At Death's Door .....	476
• CHAPTER 8	Deeply Intertwined .....	490
• CHAPTER 9	Hatred From Marriage Rejection .....	503
• CHAPTER 10	Eastern Province Rebellion .....	520
• CHAPTER 11	Exposing The Scheme .....	533
• CHAPTER 12	Flying Dragon Spear .....	548
• CHAPTER 13	An Evil Beauty .....	564

### **VOLUME 14:**

• CHAPTER 1	Xianyang Happenings .....	579
• CHAPTER 2	Re-visiting The Brothel .....	597
• CHAPTER 3	The Great Hunting Fair .....	616
• CHAPTER 4	The Incredible Talented Lady Ji .....	629
• CHAPTER 5	A Heartless Man Indeed .....	645
• CHAPTER 6	Campfire Banquet .....	658
• CHAPTER 7	Exchanging Pointers On The Duelling ....	681
• CHAPTER 8	The Mighty Jing Jun .....	697
• CHAPTER 9	Blessing In Disguise .....	712
• CHAPTER 10	Killing Four Birds With Two Arrows .....	726
• CHAPTER 11	The Special Elite Forces .....	742
• CHAPTER 12	A Chaotic Banquet .....	757

### **VOLUME 15:**

• CHAPTER 1	Clash Of The Titans .....	774
-------------	---------------------------	-----

• CHAPTER 2	Calm Before The Storm .....	789
• CHAPTER 3	A Happy Turn Of Events .....	803
• CHAPTER 4	Lifetime's First Victory .....	819
• CHAPTER 5	Mysterious Attackers .....	832
• CHAPTER 6	Borrowing A Raft .....	848
• CHAPTER 7	Ferocious Wolves Of The Remote ..... Mountains	860
• CHAPTER 8	Joining Company & Journeying Together	875
• CHAPTER 9	Setting Sail On The River Huai .....	895
• CHAPTER 10	Another Sudden Change .....	912
• CHAPTER 11	Shouchun, The Chu Capital .....	929
• CHAPTER 12	The Revival Of Prestige .....	948
• CHAPTER 13	History Repeats Itself .....	963

<b>ABOUT AUTHOR</b> .....	979
---------------------------	-----

<b>LIST OF AUTHOR's NOVELS</b> .....	980
--------------------------------------	-----

# The Warring States of China c. 260 BCE





# A STEP INTO THE PAST

By, HUANGYI

## VOLUME 11

### CHAPTER 1

#### A Triumphant Return

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

THE WINDING ROADS are prettily carpeted in a thick layer of grass and the river is flowing back to the east.

As Xiang Shaolong watched Shan Rou rode off alone and gradually disappear in the vast grasslands, he prayed silently for her safety.

On his left, Ji Yanran softly sighed, "Sister Rou is a very headstrong and brave lady. I confess that I am not as courageous as she is."

On his right, Teng Yi nodded in agreement, "Let's hope that she has a safe journey and will meet us at Xianyang in due time."

On the other side of Ji Yanran, Jing Jun was worried, "Third Brother, why don't you go after her? She may change her mind after your persuasion."

Xiang Shaolong chuckled, "Everyone should have the right to pursue their own dreams and their lifestyle. Otherwise, life will be meaningless."

When Ji Yanran faced him in surprise, Xiang Shaolong let out a long howl. Reining his horse, he galloped towards the west.

Ji Yanran and the rest of the men rode after him, dragging the bounded traitor Zhao Mu.

Under their neat riding formation, the dust swirled up continuously like a tornado.

As they rode at breakneck speed, they caught up to Zou Yan's entourage within a day. Despite the short separation time, it felt like years have gone by.

The Tian sisters are mad with joy, not expecting to see Xiang Shaolong so soon. Recalling their emotional departure earlier, they felt slightly awkward.

The mission is a complete success and everyone is in great spirits. The air was filled with chatter and they seemed to be on a vacation. After two months, they finally returned to Xianyang.

Lu Buwei received word of their arrival and welcomed them with Master Tu and Xiao Yuetan. When he saw Zou Yan and Ji Yanran, he recognized them immediately. Lu Buwei used to be a business magnate and had business in every state. He travelled widely and loved meeting strange and exceptional people. Zou Yan the great philosopher and Talented Lady Ji the rare beauty are obviously famous people that he had made his acquaintance.

After the usual courtesies, they entered the city on horseback and carriages.

Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong shared a carriage where Xiang Shaolong reported his adventure with deep details.

As Xiang Shaolong was wondering why Wu Yingyuan and the rest of the family did not come to receive him, Lu Buwei remarked, "The most fantastic part is nobody managed to discover your true identity during the entire mission. This is very favourable if we lead an expedition to Eastern Zhou. While the six states are in turmoil, this is the best time to attack with the army."

Xiang Shaolong asked with surprise, “So Premier Lu has intentions to attack them. Hei! Why didn’t I see any of my clansmen?”

Even more energetic than before, Lu Buwei confidently and mysteriously smiled, “Your return must remain a secret and so must Zhao Mu’s capture. We will only announce the arrival of Zou Yan and Talented Lady Ji. Otherwise, the six states will guess the relationship between you and them. Only when they are kept in the dark can we use the excuse of rebellion to get rid of Lord of Eastern Zhou at the speed of lightning.”

Xiang Shaolong understood that Qin values military achievements and Lu Buwei has nothing to show on his report card. Therefore, he is anxious for results and hoped to be made a Marquis in near future.

Eastern Zhou’s military strength is laughable. Even though it is an independent state, it’s ruler is considered the same level as the Marquises of the Seven States. If Lu Buwei officially led an expedition against Eastern Zhou, the six states may put aside their differences and join hands to protect Zhou from Qin. This will be highly disadvantageous. Thus, this war must be fought while the enemy is unprepared and be as short as possible to avoid any counterattacks.

Lu Buwei added, “Eliminating Zhou is a small issue but there is still a potential misgiving – we may incite the six states to

ally and attack Qin together. To enjoy true victory, we must handle the attack and the foreign relations equally well.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly admired his capabilities. Lu Buwei is a talented and wise man like no other. It is no surprise that he can control and strengthen Qin for the next ten odd years. He took the chance to ask about Xianyang and Qin developments.

Lu Buwei revealed a sinister smile and replied in a deep voice, “A group of men under Lord Yangquan are spreading rumours that I have poisoned you to death and that Prince Zheng (Xiao Pan) is my child with Empress Zhu Ji. They are doing this so that the King will change the order of succession. Humph! I will let them die with a burial place. All their wives, concubines and daughters will become courtesans and prostitutes to be ravaged by men in order for me to vent this hatred in my heart.”

Xiang Shaolong’s spine turned cold upon hearing this. Offending this man is not something trivial. But on the other hand, if Lu Buwei or himself has been captured by Lord Yangquan, the consequences will be the same. This is a dog-eat-dog world and whoever is soft-hearted will surely suffer.

Lu Buwei continued, “We are lucky to have the full support of King Zhuangxiang and Empress Zhu Ji to put in a good word for us. Now that you have captured Zhao Mu, I will take this opportunity to annihilate Eastern Zhou and Lord Yangquan at the same time. By then, everyone in Qin will have to dance to my tune.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. It is because of this attitude that will force Xiao Pan the future Qin Shihuang to kill him. When that happens, he has to turn his back to him as well. Presently, he is Lu Buwei's confidante. In the future, they will be enemies. Thinking of this, Xiang Shaolong is full of emotions.

Lu Buwei mistook Xiang Shaolong to be worried for him. Pleased, he advised, "It has been hard on you. Please rest well at the farm and heal your soul. I have important missions waiting for your undertaking."

Xiang Shaolong enquired about the missions but Lu Buwei refused to speak further. At this point, the entourage entered Xianyang City through the east gate.

Zou Yan and Ji Yanran were sent to Wu residence while they brought Zhao Mu straight into the Qin palace.

Xiang Shaolong is tired of politics but knew that he has been deeply embroiled into the power struggle of the Qin court. For Xiao Pan, he has to help Lu Buwei against Lord Yangquan.

Thinking of this, his homecoming happiness dropped drastically. The only comfort is that he will soon see Wu Tingfang, Zhao Qian, Ting Fangshi and the rest of the girls.

Zhao Mu's complexion is dead white. His hands were tied behind him and his legs were locked in chains. Two burly Qin palace guards brought him in front of King Zhuangxiang and forced him to kneel down. At the same, they held his hair so that he has to lift his head and show his face.

King Zhuangxiang laughed, "How is Marquis doing?!"

On the right, Zhu Ji's eyes shone and besides her, Xiao Pan is burning with revenge.

Xiang Shaolong may have harboured a deep revenge for Zhao Mu but looking at his state of distress as compared to his usual grandeur, he can only sigh.

Zhao Mu did not say a single word but his eyes are shining with poisonous anger.

Zhu Ji laughed, "Marquis seems to have lost weight!"

Zhao Mu could not tolerate her insults and loudly scolded, "You slu..."

Xiang Shaolong is concerned that Zhao Mu will publicly announce that he (Zhao Mu) has slept with Zhu Ji before. Pressing against a table, he used it as a support and flew forward, his foot landing squarely on Zhao Mu's jaw. This traitor's teeth were broken and blood started to flow. His face begins to swell and the pain was so intense that he couldn't cry out.

Xiang Shaolong roared, "How dare you insult the Empress! Hng!"

Xiang Shaolong is so quick that the two guards have yet to react.

Zhu Ji is smart and sharp, knowing the real reason behind this kick. Gratefully looking at Xiang Shaolong, she pleaded

King Zhuangxiang, "Your Majesty! I want to deal with this traitor personally."

King Zhuangxiang appears to be smitten by her charms and happily promised, "As you wished. Get this traitor out of my sight and await the Empress's punishment."

The palace guards reacted to his order and dragged Zhao Mu out like an animal.

Xiang Shaolong took this break to assess Xiao Pan. In the six odd months of separation, he has become more well-built. His eyes are shining with vigour and his movements are full of spirits, developing an imposing and awe-inspiring aura that even Xiang Shaolong is a little afraid of.

Xiao Pan may be young but has undergone the pain of losing his mother. Moreover, he has to protect his secret identity so he has to develop some shrewdness.

Both of them caught each other's eyes for a second and both looked away immediately.

King Zhuangxiang faced Xiang Shaolong and contently remarked, "Grand Tutor has brought us Le Cheng's head and captured Zhao Mu alive, relieving the hate in my heart. Premier Lu, how should we reward him?"

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly intervened, "This mission is largely due to Premier Lu's strategic planning and the four masks he provided. He is the one who truly deserves this credit. I am only following his orders!"



Lu Buwei saw that he is humble despite his accomplishments and even gave credit to himself. Delighted, he laughed, "Your Majesty! To have this talented Xiang Shaolong on our side is due to your good fortune and blessings. Le Cheng and Zhao Mu's case must be kept confidential and we cannot reward Shaolong at this point. We even have to act offended and blame his incompetency to hide this truth. What does Your Majesty think?"

King Zhuangxiang frowned, "Although I agree with you, I have only good feelings for Shaolong. How can I bear to put this blame on him?"

Lu Buwei smiled, "Leave this to me! Your Majesty need not worry."

Xiang Shaolong could tell that King Zhuangxiang is still unhappy about this arrangement and respected him even more.

Ai! It is a pity that he has only two odd years of lifespan left.

Zhu Ji interrupted, "Now that Grand Tutor is back, Prince Zheng is the happiest. He has refused to learn swordsmanship from anyone other than Grand Tutor."

Xiang Shaolong is slight taken aback and looked over to Xiao Pan. As Xiao Pan looked over to him too, the chill in his eyes were slowly replaced by warm gratitude.

Lu Buwei sighed, "Prince Zheng may have to be disappointed. After Grand Tutor Xiang has taken his break, he has to leave Qin again."

Xiang Shaolong, Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan were astounded.

King Zhuangxiang sighed, "I cannot bear to see him leave but Premier is right. To eliminate Zhou, the attack and foreign relations must be handled equally well to avoid any accidents."

Zhu Ji frowned heavily and asked, "Does Your Majesty and Premier intend to make Grand Tutor Xiang work non-stop? What if his health suffers?"

Lu Buwei smiled, "Empress can rest easy. The attack will take place at least one month from now. He can take a good vacation."

Xiang Shaolong could not understand and asked, "Qin is full of talented men and I lack actual experience. Furthermore, I am a wanted man in both Wei and Zhao. Maybe..."

Lu Buwei chuckled, "Experience has to be nurtured. Xiang Shaolong is well versed in both diplomacy and war and will rise to the occasion. Regarding their internal quarrels and bad blood, it is due to mutual suspicions. If we attack them, they will rush to ally with each other. This matter is final and Shaolong need not reject any further."

Xiang Shaolong knew that he has no other choice. Sighing to himself, he pretended to be happy to have this mission. In reality, it is similar to forcing a bone down his throat.

Next, Xiang Shaolong elaborated on his Handan City encounters and communicated it like a thriller movie with action and sound effects. King Zhuangxiang was moved by

his adventures and during the exciting parts, Zhu Ji is holding onto her chest with anticipation while Xiao Pan is simply amazed.

It is only until evening did they allow him to return to Wu Residence.

Lu Buwei personally sent him home.

Xiang Shaolong was looking out of the carriage window. Under the beautiful street lamps, he was lost in Xianyang City's night view.

At his side, Lu Buwei commented, "Shaolong, do not fault me for making you run here and there. A good horse should not stop running. I am also working hard to make you my right hand man. I have friends in all the six states. Even if you are the main guy, I will send men to carry out all the groundwork and the trips will be easy for you."

Xiang Shaolong could only hypocritically answer, "I am honoured by your trust and will do my utmost best to repay your kind intentions."

Satisfied, Lu Buwei nodded, "In my opinion, time is the most crucial factor. First, we will resolve our internal conflicts and then focus on external enemies. Once we are established, we can expand our influence all over the world. This new mission is of extreme importance. We must never allow the six states to increase their prejudice and eventually work together against Qin. Everyone under the sky is greedy and there are no exceptions. As long as we are generous and present numerous bribes to the various leaders of the

enemy states, we will be able prevent them from plotting against us. Does Shaolong understand what I am trying to say?”

Xiang Shaolong acknowledged that the Wu Family has pledged their loyalty to him through this bribery as well, proving its effectiveness. No wonder Lu Buwei is dead confident of this bribery strategy. On the other hand, Xiang Shaolong abhors these under-the-table methods and prefers to fight openly and win the battle with true capabilities.

After a short contemplation, Lu Buwei added, “Although there are different strategies to deal with different states, a simple summary will be to surround the three states (Zhao, Han, and Wei) while conspiring with Qi and Chu. We can disregard Yan for the time being. Once the three states are conquered, the other three states are as good as ours. We will be able to unite the whole country and break the century-old deadlock of a leaderless nation.”

After he finished speaking, this merchant-who-rose-to-a-political leader sat back and his eyes were brimming with delight as he visualized the bright future that he is creating.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself – Your estimates are not far away from the truth but the person who unites China will be Xiao Pan and not Lu Buwei.

Lu Buwei’s strategy is an extension of Fan Yao’s ‘Making friends with those far away and conquering those who are nearby’. This is the crux of expanding one’s territory by

taking over the neighbouring land. The first casualty will be Lord of Eastern Zhou.

History has proven this to be an ingenious tactic.

By now, the entourage of horse carriages have reached the Wu Residence. Lu Buwei clapped his hand on Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and intimately said, "I will not accompany you in. Have a good rest and visit me tomorrow night. We shall have a feast to celebrate your victorious return."

Under the protection of his personal escorts, Lu Buwei left.

Before he could step into the residence, Wu Tingfang and Zhao Qian ran out of the house crying and leapt into his embrace. Behind them are Wu Yingyuan, Tao Fang, Teng Yi and the rest. Everyone has a serious look on their faces and smiled at him forcefully.

Hugging his two wives, a perplexed Xiang Shaolong asked, "Where is Ting Fangshi?"

The two girls cried even harder.

Xiang Shaolong's limbs turned cold and he could sense that something unpleasant has occurred. He looked to his father-in-law.

Wu Yingyuan sighed, "Shaolong must learn to let go. Ting Fangshi died of illness three days ago! Ai! She did not even see you for the last time."

Xiang Shaolong stood in a daze besides Ting Fangshi's corpse. She was dressed in burial clothing. Except for her face which is thinner, she looked like she was asleep. Xiang Shaolong's heart is filled with deep grief.

Wu Yingyuan continued to sigh, "After you left, she became very restless and pined for your return. In addition, her constitution has not been very good. Within a month, she fell sick and her health fluctuated."

Hot tears rushed out of Xiang Shaolong's eyes and his vision became blurred.

This unfortunate beauty has suffered abuses all her life and her life ended before she could enjoy many happy days with him

Pain and regret began to overwhelm him.

What is the meaning of life?

Three days ago, she is alive and kicking. Now, she is just a lifeless corpse.

Teng Yi came to him and put his hand around his shoulder. He persuaded, "Don't be so depressed. It will affect your health."

Xiang Shaolong tried his best to maintain his composure and slowly mentioned, "I wish to bury her near the courtyard of the Hidden Dragon Abode. That is her favourite spot. At the same time, I want to erect graves for Zhao Ni, Su'er and Su Nu..."

Before he could finish, he began to sob.

The funeral is held three days later. Lu Buwei and General Meng Ao personally came to the funeral while King Zhuangxiang sent a top official to represent him.

Xiang Shaolong did not shed another tear. Every day, he visited the graves first thing in the morning and prayed in silence.

After ten days, he began to regain his usual demeanour.

On this morning, Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang and Zhao Qin accompanied him as usual to present flowers to the graves.

After they have paid their respects, Xiang Shaolong led the three girls and went strolling in residence grounds. Still filled with strong emotions, he was visibly upset.

Ji Yanran gently advised, “Shaolong! Please don’t be so upset!”

After a short embrace, Xiang Shaolong released her from his grip and sigh, “With each death, there is someone less to talk to. Everyone who is born will die one day. Why is my life filled with calamities? Is it because I have taken too many lives?”

On his other side, Wu Tingfang was shaken, “Hubby! Do not say such things anymore! You are frightening me!”

Remembering that he has to leave them soon, he sighed, “Lu Buwei wants me to head out again and execute his foreign relations strategy.”

The three girls were alarmed at the same time.

Xiang Shaolong is even more agitated after witnessing their reactions. Determined, he vowed, "Don't worry. Whatever I do, I must bring all of you with me. We will be inseparable."

The three girls are relieved and became happy once again.

Ji Yanran teased, "There is news from Handan City. Is Shaolong interested?"

Xiang Shaolong led the girls to a nearby valley. Sitting down beside a stream, he forced himself to pay attention.

Ji Yanran reported, "After we left, Handan City deteriorated into chaos. Tian Dan and Li Yuan knew that they had failed and escaped back to Qi and Chu. King Xiaocheng thought that all of us have been sacrificed and was terribly upset. When he saw your corpse, he fainted on the spot. Now, he is bedridden and ill. Empress Jing and Guo Kai are taking charge of Zhao in his absence."

Xiang Shaolong looked towards Zhao Qian. This Third Princess of Zhao is very quiet and her head is lowered. She seems to harbour feelings for her father Xiaocheng, having a worried expression on her face.

Xiang Shaolong released a long sigh. Looking up, he saw the slopes of the valley were dotted with trees that were hundreds of years old. All of them have extremely thick trunks and they stood upright against the blowing wind. With their thick leaves and branches, they seemed to cover



half the sky. Even in this cold winter season, they did not lose a single bit of their majestic appearance.

Behind the green trees and their shade is a protruding mountain peak. It is the highest mountain peak within their compound and is widely known as the Moon Prayer Peak. It has an imposing grandeur and dazzles whoever that sets their eyes on it.

Xiang Shaolong could feel his heart stirring and suggested, "I am keen to climb Moon Prayer Peak. Can Qian'er make it?"

He needs to break out of his limbo and give himself a fresh goal so as to shake himself free from the chains of sorrow.

Initially, the three girls reacted with surprise. Zhao Qian then nodded, "Qian'er has been practising horse riding and archery with Tingfang every day. I am very athletic now! I do not see any problems in climbing Moon Prayer Peak."

For the first time since he returned, Xiang Shaolong is motivated to do something out of the ordinary. Wu Tingfang is delighted with his change and jumped up with joy, cheering, "Fang'er will get some horses so as to preserve our energy."

She then left for the valley entrance.

As the sun was shining right above their heads, they have made their way up Moon Prayer Peak. Half a mile from the highest point of the peak, the mountain has become too steep to ascend and they have to stop climbing.

From their position, they could view the entire Wu Family farm. The landscape is mainly flat grasslands with the occasional streams running through the territory. Horses, cows and goats were scattered all over the farm. Some of them animals are alone while some are grazing together in a group.

The various buildings of the Wu Family can be seen as well. Some are fully visible while some are partially visible, just like a landscape painting. With such a mesmerizing picture before them, they felt like they were on top of the world.

As the winter wind blows, the hills are nicely stacked up in different heights and the farms occupy the flatlands near and far. What a memorable experience!

Xiang Shaolong shouted with all his might, venting all the frustration in his heart. Feeling way better, he asked, "Is Dan Chu dead?"

An intoxicated Ji Yanran was gazing at him. She laughed, "He is not the one leading the tunnelling army and managed to keep his worthless life. I also have word that Empress Jing was heartbroken after learning about your death. In fact, she was so affected that she refused to eat anything for three days."

Xiang Shaolong stirred slightly. After another few seconds of thinking, he continued to ask, "Any news of Ya'er and Zhi Zhi?"

Ji Yanran replied, "Not yet. Second Brother Teng has sent someone to contact them in Daliang. If our first stop is Wei, we will be able to see them very soon!"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and laughed bitterly. He recalled the time when he had to flee from Daliang. If someone had told him he could swagger back to Daliang without a single worry, he would not believe it at all.

Ji Yanran added, "Premier Lu has officially invited godfather and myself to stay over at his place for a few days. I want to accompany you and have rejected him. Godfather has gone ahead on his own."

Zhao Qian mentioned, "Little Jun is very active. After a few days of returning, he led Liu Chao and Pu Bu all over the city to have fun. I am really concerned that he may into trouble."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "Even if we do not invite trouble, trouble will look for us. There is no way to avoid it."

Wu Tingfang happily remarked; "Fourth Brother (Wang Jian) sent you a top quality herb from the north, wanting you to enjoy it with wine. I heard from Dad that he recently defeated the Xiong Nu. His military achievements are outstanding!"

Xiang Shaolong consoled himself that there is finally one piece of good news after all.

He is highly confident about Wang Jian. During the warring states period, there are four famous generals, Qi, Jian, Po,

and Mu. They are respectively Bai Qi, Wang Jian, Lian Po and Li Mu. Zhao and Qin each possess two of these generals.

If not for King Xiaocheng's mistake during the battle of Changping, using Zhao Kuo who is only good with military theory to replace Lian Po, it will be hard to tell who will win the battle of Changping.

Now, age is catching up to Lian Po. Although the highly-talented Li Mu is around to hold the fort, he has two major obstacles. First, there are hardly any soldiers in Zhao to make a decent army. Second, Zhao's politics has fallen into the hands of the cunning and narrow-minded schemer Guo Kai. With these restrictions, he cannot fully display his prowess. Under these circumstances, what hope does Zhao have?

Bai Qi has passed away already. Now, the world belongs to Wang Jian.

## CHAPTER 2

### Powerless

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

ON THE WAY BACK, Xiang Shaolong is feeling extremely good about himself.

With the dead buried, every living human must continue to live on courageously and to strive against the never ending challenges of life.

One day, he will also die in this ancient warring period and no one will ever know that he is from the future 21st century.

Ji Yanran could sense that his mood is improving. She took the opportunity to ask, “Yanran’s clansmen are all experts in forging swords and stringing bows. Can Shaolong make arrangements for them to build a weapons manufacturing facility and eke out a living?”

Xiang Shaolong remembered that Ji Yanran and her clansmen came from the conquered state of Yue. During the ancient warring period, the sword forging techniques of Yue is the best among all the states. Famous swords like Yue Nu, Gan Jiang and Mo Ye were forged by the sword smiths of Yue. To discontinue such a skilful practice is a loss so Xiang Shaolong nodded, “Count on me. I will highlight this to Father-in-law at once. With such a big farm, mining should not be an issue.”

Ji Yanran joyously thanked, “Shaolong is also a gifted artisan. If you require any special tools, feel free to get them to produce it for you. Do you wish to speak to Uncle Qing? Throughout the generations, his family has been our country’s most outstanding artisan.”

Xiang Shaolong was excited as he recollected the training he had in the 21st century. He had attended some basic training about the construction of weapons and gunpowder. Although he has forgotten about the majority of them, he still has a vague idea. It would be impossible to produce a gun but as long as he can produce a rough idea such as creating a new alloy of various metals, it is still possible to come up with a sword that is even sharper than Gan Jiang or

Mo Ye. Pleased, he invited, "Please tell Uncle Qing to see me tonight and we can have a good chat."

Ji Yanran smiled like a blossoming flower, "Shaolong! You are so good to me. I love you."

Xiang Shaolong unshackled himself from the depressed and dispirited man he used to be and walked towards the Hidden Dragon Abode.

At dinner time, the main hall was filled with laughter for the first time since their return.

Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo, Wu Guo and Tao Fang were all present.

Xiang Shaolong told Tao Fang about Ji Yanran's suggestion and got him to be in charge of the entire affair. When he enquired about Jing Jun, Teng Yi smiled, "This kid loves to hang around Premier Lu's men. Premier Lu's residence has now become the playground for all the interesting characters all over the world. Every day, there will be some famous person who will be invited to stay with him. Now, he has over four thousand guests and it looks like this will go on for some time."

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. Lu Buwei's continued invitation of outsiders will incur the jealousy of Qin's population. Without King Zhuangxiang's support, he will not even last one day.

The Tian sisters came in to fill his wine cup.

Xiang Shaolong roped his hand around Tian Zhen's slender waist and asked, "Are you used to life here?"

Tian Zhen shyly nodded, "This place is quiet and beautiful. All the mistresses have been very nice to me. Very good... Zhen Zhen is very happy."

Chun Ying, who is attending to Tao Fang, laughed, "Zhen Zhen has just learnt how to ride a horse and is enjoying herself very much!"

Xiang Shaolong was again reminded of Ting Fangshi. Luckily, Tao Fang coincidentally interrupted his train of thought, "Master has instructed that when Shaolong is feeling better to return to Xianyang City. King Zhuangxiang and Premier Lu are eager to see you."

Xiang Shaolong agreed reluctantly. When dinner ended, everyone left as well. Xiang Shaolong returned to the inner chamber and found Ji Yanran chatting with Uncle Qing. After introducing each other further, she intentionally left them to chat on their own.

Two hours later when Ji Yanran came to find him, she witnessed her Uncle Qing listening with complete bewilderment. "How can we add this chromium into the sword forging metal?" he asked.

Xiang Shaolong was frowning heavily, "You must use another metal to combine the both of them. It can be done. Let me do the trial forging!"

Surprised, Ji Yanran commented, "Shaolong is unpredictable. I have never seen Uncle Qing so taken aback."



Xiang Shaolong thought that it is fortunate that he is an amateur at this craft or he would have caused Uncle Qing to faint with shock.

Over the next five days, Xiang Shaolong abandoned all his work and spent his days having fun and touring with his wives and maids. Together, they had the most wonderful and fulfilling time. When he was about to leave the farm, he was still melancholic but his energy is vastly different from before.

On the second night in Xianyang City, Lu Buwei hosted a banquet for them. Wu Yingyuan, Teng Yi, Jing Jun and Ji Yanran were all present.

The co-hosts are Meng Ao and his two sons, Master Tu, Xiao Yuetan and guest Zou Yan.

Beauties are welcomed everywhere they go, not to mention this is the talented and crowd pleasing first class beauty. The moment she stepped into the hall, she captured the attention of everyone present and was given the best seat.

Meng Ao's two sons Meng Wu and Meng Tian are slightly younger than Jing Jun but both of them possess a sturdily built body with nicely formed muscles. For their age, they were awe-inspiring.

A few rounds of drinks later, Meng Ao got his two sons to fight with real swords to add to the celebratory mood. Energetically leaping around with their swords brandishing, they exchanged strong blows as heard from the heavy clashing of their weapons.

Ten over rounds later, they separated and bowed to the audience. Despite the intense fight sequence, their faces are not red and they are breathing normally as they returned to their seats besides their father.

Everyone cheered at this magnificent display. Jing Jun has been hanging out with them and cheered louder than the rest.

Xiang Shaolong recollected that Meng Tian will be another famous Qin General other than father and son team Wang Jian and Wang Ben so he paid extra attention.

Seated opposite Ji Yanran, Lu Buwei smiled, "What does Shaolong think of these two kids?"

Xiang Shaolong sincerely praised, "General Meng's sons are brave and highly skilled. They will succeed General to become another famous General. I personally guarantee with my own head."

Meng Ao is extremely pleased when he heard this and bellowed to his sons, "Quickly give your thanks to Grand Tutor!"

Meng Wu and Meng Tian immediately stood up and kowtowed towards Xiang Shaolong. Xiang Shaolong got up hurriedly and helped them up. In his heart, he was thinking that it is not as easy as it looks.

Back in his seat, Lu Buwei expectedly suggested, "Since they were thirteen, they have been going into war with General Meng but General Meng regards them as only suitable for

weapons demonstration as they lack real experience. Moreover, they lack familiarity in leading soldiers into battle. We hope Shaolong can take them under your care.”

Meng Ao asked with complete earnestness, “I have seen countless men all my life but have never come across anyone as extraordinary as Grand Tutor. If you don’t mind, I hope you can bring my two boys with you on your foreign relations mission.”

Xiang Shaolong knew that he could never decline and laughed, “General Meng has been a true friend and I will gladly accept.”

He secretly analyzed that Lu Buwei is doing his best to cultivate talents and it appears that he is not satisfied with only being the Premier of Qin.

As Meng Wu and Meng Tian kowtow with thanks, this arrangement is decided.

Lu Buwei was about to speak when a family warrior rushed in out of a sudden. He came to Lu Buwei’s side and whispered a few words, attracting everyone’s attention.

Lu Buwei was greatly agitated and cried, “Zhao’s King Xiaocheng is dead!”

The entire hall quietened down.

When everyone is home at Wu residence after the banquet, Zou Yan got Xiang Shaolong to a corner and began chatting.

In the tranquil side room, Zou Yan spoke about a few unimportant topics before inquiring, “Lu Buwei has placed a lot of emphasis on Shaolong. What does Shaolong think?”

Xiang Shaolong accepted the Zou Yan is exceedingly intelligent and his observation skill is second to none. If he says something, there has to be a good reason behind. After a brief contemplation, he sighed, “I am in a dilemma too... Ai! It’s snowing.”

Outside the window and against the backdrop of the black night, snowflakes are fluttering gently.

Zou Yan stood up and slowly walked to the window sill. Clasp his hands and admiring the later-than-expected first snowfall, he resembles an immortal from heaven.

Xiang Shaolong joined him at the window. Zou Yan is thrilled by the snowfall and suggested that they proceed to admire the snowflakes more clearly at the garden pavilion.

Amidst the falling snow, they strolled to the pavilion and stood erected side by side.

Zou Yan sighed deeply, “For the past eight days, Lu Buwei has been pestering me about Fengshui. He wants to find an auspicious burial plot for his deceased father. This man is exceedingly ambitious and Shaolong should be careful.”

Xiang Shaolong is full of respect for this philosopher.

Lu Buwei’s countless conversations with Zou Yan are simply out to determine if he is the new saint. Zou Yan could tell that he is not the real deal and issued this warning to

prevent Xiang Shaolong from becoming too deeply embroiled with him.

Zou Yan spontaneously added, "On numerous occasions, Lu Buwei wanted me to endorse his *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lu*. I have rejected his offer on the excuse that the contents are preposterous. Does Shaolong know why?"

Xiang Shaolong could guess that this philosopher is using himself as an analogy to enlighten him. He humbly asked, "Please continue, Godfather."

Zou Yan laughed, "This is the first time you addressed me as godfather. Are you used to it?"

Xiang Shaolong chuckled with embarrassment as Zou Yan continued, "Lu Buwei is a person who has his own mind. Even if he heavily emphasizes on you, in actual fact, you are just another tool to help him achieve his beautiful dream. Using the example of *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lu*, he is trying to impose his will onto others."

Xiang Shaolong remembered hearing Li Si mention about letting Xiao Pan study the contents of the ancient encyclopaedias. He did not have the details and took this chance to ask, "Does his annals make sense?"

Zou Yan despising ranted, "What 'Rule by benevolence' as the mainstay and 'Rewards and punishment' as a support. They are all impractical stuff by Confucius. It is taking a step back, not a step forward. We can only excel if we keep moving forward. Since Shang Yang's reforms, Qin has been governed by military law. Lu Buwei's theories are the exact

opposite. There will be trouble in the future and Shaolong has to take note.”

Xiang Shaolong lowered his voice, “Godfather has great foresight. If my estimates are not incorrect, Lu Buwei will get into trouble sooner or later and die a horrible death.”

Zou Yan was shaken and glanced at him, realising, “So Shaolong has seen it coming. I have been worried over nothing.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed. It is because he knew of such a future that he cannot really relax and enjoy his current wealth and lifestyle. Maybe it is better to be ignorant about the future.

It is starting to snow heavily.

The next morning, Xiang Shaolong was summoned to Lu Buwei’s residence. Receiving him in his study, Lu Buwei exclaimed, “Later, Shaolong must enter the palace with me to visit His Majesty. Ai! I have been making excuses for you for ten over days and Empress Ji almost lost her temper.”

He proceeded to advise, “Empress Ji seems to be concerned about you. Do not get into any trouble with her or even I will not be able to protect you.”

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, “Rest assured Premier!”

Lu Buwei nodded, “I trust that you can resist her as well. I am concerned about you and just wanted to share this advice.”

Lu Buwei thought for a few seconds and revealed, “I have decided to lead the expedition to Eastern Zhou personally with Meng Ao as my assistant general. By the time Shaolong arrived in Han, Eastern Zhou should be eliminated and the Zhou legacy will end. From this moment, it will be a battle of the world’s best heroes.”

A short pause later, he added, “With Xiaocheng’s death, Empress Jing and Guo Kai will be in power. Their political scene will be in chaos. I need to adjust my strategies to take advantage of this opportunity. The day I get rid of Lord Yangquan will be the day we expand our Qin operations. Before this happens, Shaolong must assist me in managing the six states. If they join forces against us because of our attack on Zhou, we will be at a disadvantage.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed helplessly. Whoever is anti-Lu Buwei is also anti-Xiang Shaolong. Presently, the fate of Wu Family and himself are intertwined with Lu Buwei’s. If Lu Buwei meets with a calamity, they will be affected as well. If Lord Yangquan manages to change the succession order, Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan may lose their lives. Xiang Shaolong can only nod his head in agreement.

Digging deeper, everyone is only working for their personal benefits. If you talk about moral ethics, you will suffer at the hands of the rest of the unscrupulous people.

Lu Buwei’s eyes were shining sharply while he detailed, “On this trip, you will have a mask to hide your real identity as well. We must have different men accompanying you.

Otherwise, when one man gets recognized, they will link you to Dong Horse Fanatic and everything will be even more complicated. Luckily, we have no shortage of manpower. From my own family warriors, I will select a band of loyal and expert swordsmen to be your personal escorts. We will add another thousand elite cavalry (soldiers on horseback) to accompany you. This arrangement should be able to protect you from any potential dangers during the trip. Xiao Yuetan will be joining you as your personal assistant.”

Xiang Shaolong is alarmed. From another point of view, these family warriors of Lu Buwei can be spying on him as well. Inspired, he checked, “Can Premier Lu add Li Si to my team?”

Puzzled, Lu Buwei stared at him and hesitated for a while before consenting, “Since Shaolong has such a request, I will see to it! Come! Let’s enter the palace and see the King!”

On the surface, things appear to be fine but from his hesitation, Lu Buwei is actually unhappy. It is hard to decide if he is unhappy over Xiang Shaolong’s independent mindset or that he does not think very highly of Li Si.

Beyond the carriage window, Xianyang has transformed into a pure white wonderland as it snowed non-stop.

The first snow is always the most delightful. In addition, the weather is not freezing cold. Some kids are running along the streets playing snow games. When the horse carriage turned into the main road leading to the palace, Xiang Shaolong could see some young girls making snowballs. He



noticed that women are not confined to their homes, a practice which began after the Han Dynasty. During the warring states period, the State of Qin is the most open-minded as they are descendants of barbarians.

Lu Buwei did not say a word during the journey as both men are deep in their thoughts.

Out of the blue, Xiang Shaolong grasped the deep meaning behind Lu Buwei's conquest.

Snow and heavy wind is disadvantageous for an attacking army but in this case, it brings two benefits instead.

Firstly, this move is unanticipated by common people. Under the cover of the snow, the invaders can make their way to the city wall undetected.

It is difficult to travel during winter season and communications is as good as non-existent. By the time the six states know about the attack, Eastern Zhou would have been conquered. Even if they knew about the attack at the earliest instance, they can only watch helplessly as it is an uphill task to intercede.

From this strategy, Lu Buwei has displayed his courage and risk-taking appetite. When they become enemies in the future, Xiang Shaolong must guard against his characteristic or he may stand to lose out.

Lu Buwei entered the Qin palace and went straight into the inner chambers as if it is his own residence. He alighted from his carriage at the garden bordering the inner chambers.

Without reporting his presence, he swaggered into the back palace surrounded by his personal escorts.

Compared to six months ago when Xiang Shaolong first came to Qin, Lu Buwei's standing has been raised dramatically.

King Zhuangxiang emphasizes on relationships and trust while Lu Buwei is an ambitious and crafty schemer. Together, King Zhuangxiang will only be manipulated and controlled by Lu Buwei.

Sounds of wooden swords clashing can be heard ahead of them.

Lu Buwei has a comforted smile on his face and remarked, "The Crown Prince is practising his swordsmanship."

Viewing his expression, Xiang Shaolong wanted to tell him that Xiao Pan is not his son and see his reaction.

Moving forward, the corridor that they were walking along opened up into a bigger area.

Between two palace buildings is a small courtyard. Under the fluttering snowflakes, Xiao Pan is duelling with another child of around the same age.

Watching at the side are King Zhuangxiang, Zhu Ji, Lady Xiuli and Prince Cheng. There are also ten over palace attendants, two sword fighting coaches and one minister. They are surrounded by palace guards and the atmosphere is very strict and solemn.

King Zhuangxiang and the rest of them did not see them coming in. Lu Buwei whispered to Xiang Shaolong, "The boy duelling with the Crown Prince is Wang Jian's son Wang Ben. Within the palace, he is the best fighter in his age group."

Xiang Shaolong was excited and carefully assessed this future invincible general. He is indeed stocky and he has an alert expression on his face just like Wang Jian. He knows when is the best time to attack and defend and is always one step ahead. If you can forecast an adult's success by analyzing his childhood, this 13 year old is already resembling a great general.

He still possesses some queries regarding the palace rules. How did Wang Ben get the rare honour to be Xiao Pan's practice partner? This must be Lu Buwei's idea to get Wang Jian over to his side.

King Zhuangxiang caught sight of them and joyfully waved them over.

Xiang Shaolong observed the pure bliss on his face and could not help asking himself, Do nice guys really finish last?

King Zhuangxiang whole heartedly received this benefactor who had helped him ascend the throne. Did he ever think that he is actually keeping a tiger as a pet?

This is not a time for deep thinking. Collecting his thoughts, he strode over to King Zhuangxiang.

Pack! Xiao Pan's wooden sword has been swept aside by Little Wang Ben, leaving him exposed.

Little Wang Ben frantically kept his sword and retreated. Kneeling on the floor, he pleaded, “Prince Zheng, please forgive Little Ben for being rash.”

Xiao Pan saw Xiang Shaolong and is not interested in the duel anymore. However, he actually went forward and helped Little Ben up. He then whispered some nice words into Wang Ben ears.

Xiang Shaolong did not know whether to be happy or fearful. This teenager Qin Shihuang has already learnt how to curry favour.

## CHAPTER 3

## Lady Hua Yang

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG and Lu Buwei went ahead to pay their respects to King Zhuangxiang and the rest of his companions. Lu Buwei chuckled, “Shaolong has never met General Xu Xian!”

Xu Xian has the body of a typical Qin, tall and stocky. Just slightly shorter than Xiang Shaolong and Lu Buwei, he is dressed simply in official robes. If he puts on his combat armour, he will become the prestigious and fear-inducing Qin general.

Xu Xian's eyes are lively but his cheekbones are too high and run in contrast with his straight nose, making his face slightly disorganised. Around thirty, he radiates calm and steadiness. After a few general exchanges with Xiang Shaolong, he plainly said, "I have heard of Grand Tutor's fame a long time ago. Unfortunately, I was guarding the border and can only meet you today."

Xiang Shaolong sensed that Xu Xian's tone is icy and carry a hint of disdain. He did not seem to hold any respect for Lu Buwei at all. Xiang Shaolong could guess what has transpired and dare not extend the conversation.

Before Zhu Ji has a chance to speak up, the less enchanting and less graceful Lady Xiuli smiled, "General Xu is our famous general. Together with General Wang and Lu Gong, they are known as the three tiger generals of Qin!"

Xu Xian quickly expressed his modesty but no happiness can be seen from his face.

Xiang Shaolong analyzed the situation and committed it to memory. However, he still has no idea who Lu Gong is.

Xu Xian is on Lord Yangquan and Lady Xiuli's side and obviously has no good feelings for Lu Buwei. He had even mistaken Xiang Shaolong to be Lu Buwei's follower.

On the surface, Lu Buwei appears to be respectful and invited, "Only heroes can relate to heroes. Why don't you have a drink at my residence and exchange pointers with Shaolong?"

Xu Xian smiled, "Premier is too generous!"

Turning around, he bade farewell to King Zhuangxiang and left without giving a definite answer to Lu Buwei's invitation.

Xiang Shaolong has a good impression of this gentleman who places his principles above his fear of authority.

Xiao Pan led Little Ben and greeted Grand Tutor Xiang. After paying obeisance, Little Ben asked, "Father is full of praises for Grand Tutor. When Grand Tutor is teaching Prince Zheng, can I watch at the side?"

Everyone burst out laughing after hearing him. Only Prince Chen glimpsed briefly at Xiang Shaolong before looking away. Prince Chen must have been influenced by the rumours spread by Lu Buwei's enemies.

An attendant came to report that the Empress Dowager wishes to see Xiao Pan.

King Zhuangxiang immediately instructed Xiao Pan to visit Lady Hua Yang under the escort of the attendant and other palace guards. Although Xiao Pan is unwilling to leave, he does not have a choice and departed with disappointment.

King Zhuangxiang made some comments to Empress Zhu Ji and concubine Lady Xiuli before bringing Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong into the imperial study. It then dawned upon Xiang Shaolong that this is not an ordinary visit.

In the study, the King and the two men took their respective seats. All the palace guards were dismissed, leaving the three of them in total privacy.

Seated higher, King Zhuangxiang looked to Xiang Shaolong who is seated on his lower left and smiled, "Shaolong is an appreciative family man and a great friend as well. I wished to have a longer chat with you but that will have to wait. Have you rested well?"

Xiang Shaolong is full of appreciation for King Zhuangxiang and his genuine caring nature. Among all the Kings of the seven states, this nature hardly exists. He hurriedly gave his thanks and affirmation.

Lu Buwei is surprisingly quiet and giggled at Xiang Shaolong.

King Zhuangxiang's eyes are shining with reflection as he softly sighed, "I have been held hostage in Zhao for a prolonged period and I had a rough time. Despite this, I managed to experience the sufferings of the commoners. As the King today, I still remind myself to understand what the common people are going through and create laws that benefit them. Ai! I also do not wish to start a war after I barely ascended the throne. However, Premier Lu is right. Offence is the best defence. If you do not attack others, others will eventually attack you. During these turbulent times, the only way to survive is to fight power with power. Ai!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned. If not for Lu Buwei's fanning the flames, King Zhuangxiang will not send his army against Eastern Zhou. In order to fully convince King Zhuangxiang, Lu Buwei must have proven that Eastern Zhou is collaborating with the other six states against Qin.



Unknowingly, he had lent Lu Buwei a big helping hand.

Lu Buwei intercepted, "This cannot be helped. The six states have ulterior motives towards Qin and are keen to limit our progress. Although Eastern Zhou is only made up of seven small provinces Henan, Luoyang, Guchen, Pingying, Yanshi, Gonghe and Zhongshi; we have to pass by their cities in order to reach the six states. Rather than let the six states occupy them and blockade us, it is better to attack first."

The corner of King Zhuangxiang's mouth curled up in a bitter smile and he did not reply at once. The atmosphere is filled with tension.

Lu Buwei officially state, "A single wrong step can cause the whole country to be annihilated. Please do not hesitate. Xiaocheng has just passed away and Han is at its weakest point. This is a golden opportunity which must not be missed. Otherwise, the consequences will unbearable."

King Zhuangxiang simply said, "I understand. Premier, please proceed to attack Zhou!"

Facing Xiang Shaolong, he added, "I have discussed with Premier Lu. The elimination of Zhou is akin to chopping off an arm for Han's King Huan Hui. There is not much we can do to appease him. Instead, we will focus on the other states. I know that Shaolong is an intelligent man. Therefore, we will leave everything to your discretion."

Lu Buwei reminded, "Among the five states, Zhao and Yan are at war and we can ignore them for the time being. Regarding the other three states, we must not neglect Qi

and Chu. We must wholeheartedly convince them that the attack on Zhou is an act of deterrent and not expansion. Between these two states, it is much easier to negotiate with Chu. Shaolong can present our good intentions to King Xiaolie. If you can sign an alliance treaty, it will be even better. Our Prince Zheng is growing up and it will be good to find a wife for him. I heard that King Xiaolie's teenage daughter is a great beauty and is only slightly older than Crown Prince. If you can fix a marriage agreement for them, the Chu will definitely be appeased."

Xiang Shaolong is nodding his head but his heart is groaning; Isn't this bringing calamity to Chu's little princess? Moreover, Xiang Shaolong has to lie through his teeth and bring harm to the other party. Although he is not so innocent that he has never cause harm to others but whenever he plots against someone, he had a valid reason and a strong motive. Take Zhao Mu's capture as an example. It is for personal revenge and also self-preservation, unlike this mission which is to strike the potential enemy first.

To console himself, he thought, Tian Dan, Li Yuan, Prince Xinling, Han Chuang and Lord Longyang are all plotting and harming people every day to benefit themselves and their own countries.

He could not help but smiled bitterly.

King Zhuangxiang has been scrutinising his facial expressions. Understandingly, he commented with a tinge of guilt, "I can tell that Shaolong is a hero and does not employ

dirty tricks and schemes. Like you, I hated these trying times where you have to kill or be killed. Ai! There are many things I am doing against my will but they have to be done.”

Ending, he sighed loudly.

Lu Buwei frowned, “Is Your Majesty referring to Lord Yangquan?”

Helplessly, King Zhuangxiang nodded, “After all, he is the younger brother of the Empress Dowager. If not for his past effort in getting the Emperor to acknowledge me as his successor, the Empress Dowager may refuse to accept me. Now that I have to confront him, the Empress Dowager will be very upset.”

Lu Buwei left his seat and kneeled down, promising, “Rest assured Your Majesty. I will do my utmost best to handle this matter. Unless the Left Premier is really staging a rebellion, I will not act. We can try to hide this matter from Empress Dowager and not disturb her peaceful lifestyle.”

Witnessing this, Xiang Shaolong could only join Lu Buwei in kneeling in front of King Zhuangxiang. In his heart, he admired Lu Buwei’s tactic. Lu Buwei is highly versatile and knows how to please King Zhuangxiang. No wonder he can remain in his good books for so long.

He naturally knew that Lu Buwei is lying. Given his treacherous methods, he can easily force Lord Yangquan to rebel. By then, he will have acquired Lord Yangquan’s authority and killing him or not is inconsequential.

King Zhuangxiang is expectedly happy. When the two men have returned to their seats, he joyfully proclaim, "With Premier Lu's promise, I can put my mind at ease."

Lu Buwei informed Xiang Shaolong, "Although you have been here for almost a year, the time spent at Xianyang is limited and there are many things you are unaware of. Nonetheless, you need not be distracted with these matters. I have prepared everything for you. In three days, you will leave for Wei in order to coincide with our plan to attack Eastern Zhou."

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself and consented.

An attendant came to report that Empress Dowager Lady Hua Yang wishes to see Xiang Shaolong. The three men are equally shocked.

Under the attendant guidance, Xiang Shaolong arrived at the giant palace on the east. Stepping into one of her chambers, he noticed that besides Xiao Pan, Qin Qing whose beauty rivalled Ji Yanran is also present and is seated on the right of Lady Hua Yang. He hurriedly kneeled down to pay his respects.

Dressed in luxurious and glamorous clothes, Lady Hua Yang is in her mid forties and she glows with a unique royal charm. Age is catching up to her and her makeup cannot conceal all her wrinkles. Despite all this, Xiang Shaolong can easily visualize the days when she is the favourite woman of King Zhuangxiang's father and her beauty was envied by all.

On her right, the widow Qin Qing is as emotionless as ever. She appears to be unconcerned about everything under the sky. Even Xiang Shaolong's presence did not draw a single reaction from her.

In a gentle and peaceful voice, Lady Hua Yang hailed, "Grand Tutor please rise!"

Xiang Shaolong stood up nervously. He does not know what this powerful Qin Empress Dowager has summoned him for. Respectfully lowering his head, he dare not face her straight on.

After an uncomfortable silence, Lady Hua Yang gently said, "Grand Tutor, please raise your head."

Xiang Shaolong obeyed and raised his head to face this Lady Hua Yang who is seated on a raised platform. He intentionally did not look at Qin Qing and Xiao Pan.

Their eyes met.

Lady Hua Yang's eyes lit up and sighed, "Such a talent, you are indeed a dragon among men. Do not mistake me for judging by appearances. If you are full of integrity, you will radiate a similar aura. If you have been upright all your life, your eyes will shine with righteousness. When I first saw His Majesty, I could tell that he has a kind heart and will be a good king who loves his followers. He is far better than the other wilful and arrogant candidate to succeed the throne. I confessed to the late King that I was fortunate to enter the palace and serve him but did not have the luck to produce an heir for him. I wished for the late King to decree

Zhuangxiang as my son to fulfil my dream. The late King granted my wish and I was officially appointed as his mother. Other people mistook me for being selfish but they have no idea that there is a deeper meaning to it.”

Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted as he could not imagine this Lady Hua Yang to be such a street smart heroine. She had chosen the right man to rule Qin. The only issue is that she has neglected Lu Buwei the ambitious man. After all, Lu Buwei’s interest to dominate the whole world may not be in Qin’s best interests.

Lady Hua Yang sighed, “Grand Tutor Xiang, please be seated. Ai! Three days later, it will be the late king’s death anniversary so I am slightly emotional. Please do not take offence.”

Xiang Shaolong sat down with uncertainty and he was served tea by an attendant. Within the chamber, the atmosphere was peaceful and tranquil. Outside the chamber, the landscape is ever changing as the white snow accumulates wherever they land.

Qin Qing the classic ancient beauty has her head lowered and remained silent throughout. She looks like she do not require anything more in life but still be very satisfied and at peace.

She resembles a white lotus that can only be admired from afar. If one has any evil thoughts about her, it will only ruin her perfect composure.

Until now, Xiang Shaolong did not have a single clue why Lady Hua Yang summoned him. Unable to hold back any longer, he glanced over to Xiao Pan. Xiao Pan has been staring at him and shook his head slightly to assure him that there is nothing to be worried about.

The chamber is so quiet that no one wants to be the first to destroy this stillness.

Just as Xiang Shaolong is preparing to spend his time admiring the lovely interior design of the chamber, Lady Hua Yang softly remarked, "Today, my main purpose to summon you is to see what kind of man would Ji Yanran, whose fame is equal to Qin Qing, will fall in love with. I have finally gotten a satisfactory answer!"

Xiang Shaolong was finally enlightened and expressed his modesty.

The silent Qin Qing at last speak up in a voice that is more melodious than the singing of the forest birds, "Miss Ji has been here for some time but I have yet to meet her. Can Grand Tutor Xiang make an arrangement for us to meet? The Empress Dowager wishes to meet her as well. I heard that Mister Zou Yan is a top philosopher. If he has the time to make the journey here, I will receive them with sincerity."

By hearing how she represented Lady Hua Yang to invite both persons shows Qin Qing's high standing within the Empress Dowager's palace.

Xiang Shaolong had to look over to her. The moment their eyes meet, this beauty tried to avoid his gaze.

Irritated, Xiang Shaolong smiled, “Does Grand Tutor Qin’s guest list includes myself as well?”

Qin Qing was taken aback. A hint of displeasure can be seen on her face. She continued to avoid his gaze and kept her head lowered.

Lady Hua Yang laughed, “Grand Tutor Xiang, please excuse Qing’er. After losing her husband, she does not come into contact with any young men.”

Xiang Shaolong apologised, “I am really sorry for offending you. Will Grand Tutor Qin please forgive me? I have to return home and prepare for my mission. If there is nothing else from Her Majesty, Shaolong hereby asks to take his leave.”

Lady Hua Yang was roused and asked, “When is Grand Tutor Xiang leaving?”

Xiang Shaolong told her accordingly. After a short contemplation, Lady Hua Yang checked, “Does Grand Tutor Xiang’s trip includes the State of Chu?”

Xiang Shaolong recalled that she is of Chu royalty. When King Zhuangxiang first met her, Lu Buwei dressed him up as a Chu citizen to remind Lady Hua Yang of her Chu origins. That is also the reason King Zhuangxiang changed his name to Zi Chu (Son of Chu). Xiang Shaolong reported that he will make a trip to Chu as well.

Lady Hua Yang sighed, “Within these two days, I will send someone to pass something to Grand Tutor. When Grand



Tutor is in Chu, please help me to pass the item to Lady Xiu. Ai! If not for my health, I really hope to make a trip back to Chu personally.”

Xiang Shaolong consented and left without looking at Qin Qing anymore.

Ten odd steps away from the chamber entrance, Xiao Pan ran out of the chamber after him. The palace guards protecting him are running over as well.

Xiao Pan faced the palace guards and ordered, “Stand where you are and stop following me!”

All the palace guards instantly halted to a complete stop and remained motionless.

After Xiao Pan showed his authority, he pretended that nothing has happened and led Xiang Shaolong into the garden. With his two eyes turning red, he cried, “Master! I killed Zhao Mu! Please do not hold it against me. This is the last time I am addressing you as Master. I will not dare to do it in the future.”

Xiang Shaolong was getting worried about the power of the future Qin Shihuang. He was taken by surprise at this news and he reconfirmed, “You killed Zhao Mu?”

Holding back his hot tears, Xiao Pan coldly revealed, “I whispered into his ear who I really am and that I am killing him to avenge my mother. With that, I stabbed him in the centre of his heart. Grand Tutor taught me that this is the

surest way to kill somebody. Hng! The terrible way he died is really pleasing. Mum can finally rest in peace.”

Xiang Shaolong is freezing all over.

Xiao Pan was 13 when he left Handan City. As a 14 year old, not only does he have the guts to kill, he knows exactly how to kill a man for sure. Even though he is avenging his mother’s death, his cruelty and his indifferent attitude is chilling to the bone.

Xiao Pan noticed that Xiang Shaolong is keeping quiet. He thought that Xiang Shaolong is upset with him and hurriedly said, “Grand Tutor need not worry. After I killed him, I jumped into the Empress’s bosom and cried that I have taken revenge for her instead. I guarantee that nobody will find out. They all had the impression that I loved my Empress mother greatly.”

Xiang Shaolong was tongue-tied and could not find an appropriate reply.

Xiao Pan softly said, “But I really care for Empress!”

Xiang Shaolong finally uttered, “We must not be alone for too long. Your parents and Premier are waiting for us to have lunch together...”

Xiao Pan held onto his sleeve and pleaded, “Grand Tutor! Can you visit me before you leave?”

Xiang Shaolong nodded in agreement before they left the Empress Dowager palace.

Back in the Wu Residence, it is nearly evening.

As he alighted from the horse carriage, an attendant reported that Li Si is here to look for him. Presently, he is waiting in the guest hall. Xiang Shaolong rushed over to see Li Si.

After the usual courtesies, a seated Li Si gratefully thanked, "Due to your recommendation, Li Si is able to accompany Grand Tutor to visit the six states. I do not know how I can repay your kindness. Ai! Life in the Premier residence is causing me to lose my sex appetite."

Xiang Shaolong did not expect him to sprout vulgarities. He smiled, "Brother Li need not thank me. It is me who will need to rely on Brother Li! When you are more familiar about the six states, it will help in the progress of your career."

Li Si hesitated for while. Unable to endure any longer, he had to ask, "I had thought it over many times but I still do not know why Grand Tutor has such high aspirations for me? I have always been deprived of an opportunity to showcase my talent..."

Xiang Shaolong laughed and patted his shoulder, "I have never made a mistake in choosing the right people. Has Brother Li packed your luggage?"

Li Si's face turned light red and he awkwardly replied, "The moment I received the order from Premier, I got everything ready for the trip."

Both men look at each other in the eye and suddenly burst out laughing, knowing what each other is think about.

To this future Grand Premier of Qin, Xiang Shaolong invited, "Since you are here, why don't Brother Li stay for dinner?"

Li Si chuckled, "There are many days ahead of us and we will certainly dine together during the trip."

Xiang Shaolong understood that he wants to avoid raising Lu Buwei's suspicions and did not repeat his offer. While sending him to the main door, he took the chance to ask, "Is Brother Li clear about the situation in Xianyang?"

Li Si answered in a low voice, "Let's talk more on the road."

Watching as he gradually disappeared from sight, Xiang Shaolong was feeling really ridiculous and crazy for him. The current Li Si is lowly regarded by everyone and down on his luck but who could have guessed that in the future, he will be the Grand Premier of Qin?

## CHAPTER 4

## Exhausted

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG fetched Ji Yanran and Zou Yan to the Empress Dowager palace before he went to find Xiao Pan and Wang Ben. He got them to duel with each other first and then instructed them to attack him at the same time.

The two boys are thrilled to hear this and raised their wooden swords to attack him like in a real fight. Having inherited his father's strength coupled with a good martial arts foundation in swordsmanship, Little Ben is especially

excited. Unless it is Xiang Shaolong, otherwise, it will be hard to fight both of them without hurting them.

Xiang Shaolong shifted to the side and evaded a thrust from Wang Ben. He returned a thrust which Wang Ben hastily avoided by retreating. It was a false retreat. As Xiang Shaolong parried a blow from Xiao Pan's wooden sword, Wang Ben leapt towards him and chopped down heavily on Xiang Shaolong's head.

"Good move!" Xiang Shaolong cried and met his blow head on. Piak! Wang Ben's entire arm went numb. Wang Ben was about to press on with another attack when Xiang Shaolong raised his right foot, pretending to kick out. A shocked Wang Ben fell back, sheathing his sword with his face full of indignation.

Xiang Shaolong stopped the fight and smiled at Wang Ben, "Are you angry that I did not follow the rules and tried to kick you?"

Wang Ben's face reddened. Lowering his head, he replied, "I dare not!"

Xiang Shaolong softly asked, "If you are fighting a war, will you blame the enemy for kicking you?" His voice turned fierce at the last line.

Wang Ben quivered with fright. Kneeling down on the floor, he shouted, "I understand!"

Xiang Shaolong is satisfied with his reply and roared, "Then you better get up and attack now!"

Wang Ben shot up from his kneeling position and advanced very quickly with his wooden sword thrusting at chest level.

Xiao Pan is spurned on and attacked Xiang Shaolong from the other side.

Xiang Shaolong laughed and kicked the blunt side of Xiao Pan's wooden sword. He continued to evade Wang Ben's powerful strike and tripped him. Wang Ben fell flat on his face and lost hold of his wooden sword.

Xiang Shaolong noticed that Xiao Pan is undefended and thrust his sword towards him.

Just when Xiao Pan is about to be stabbed, Wang Ben somersaulted up and used his body to shield Xiao Pan.

Xiang Shaolong frantically withdrew his thrust. Staring at Wang Ben, he simply asked, "Is Little Ben planning to use his body to absorb this blow?"

Wang Ben proudly declared, "Father has taught me to protect Crown Prince even at the cost of my life."

Xiang Shaolong was very moved. Smiling, he asked again, "If you did not lose your sword, you can use it to deflect my attack right?"

Wang Ben excitedly praised, "Grand Tutor is great! Father will never kick me in a swordfight."

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "This cannot be compared. Come! Let me teach you how to withstand blows."

Xiao Pan recalled the days when he was tripped heavily by Xiang Shaolong. Losing his composure, he cheered, "Ah! That's wonderful..."

Catching a stern glare from Xiang Shaolong, he quickly shut up.

A round of applause can be heard from the side. Under the escort of her palace maids, Zhu Ji came up to them and giggled, "Can Grand Tutor spare a few minutes to chat with me?"

Xiang Shaolong looked to the disappointed Xiao Pan and Wang Ben who had not fought to their heart's content. Sighing to himself, he nodded, "I will not dare to disobey Empress."

Sounds of Xiao Pan and Wang Ben's clashing and shouting can be heard from the practice grounds. Xiang Shaolong, Zhu Ji are seated in a pavilion within the royal gardens while the palace maids and palace guards are situated away from them.

Every time he faced this graceful, elegant, charming, cunning and intelligent Qin empress, Xiang Shaolong felt uneasy and anxious. He has to constantly remind himself to observe the boundaries of men and women and suppress his urge to disregard all the rules. Zhu Ji seems to be facing the same problems.

He is certain that Zhu Ji's devotion for King Zhuangxiang is a mixture of gratitude and love. Between himself and Zhu Ji is an exciting and wild passion. After all, they had met under



extraordinary circumstances. Suppressing her emotions, Zhu Ji looks especially charming.

Zhu Ji plainly gazed at him and lightly sighed, "I have barely seen you a few times when you have to leave again, making me melancholic. Ai! How can I ever repay you? You have saved us both mother and son and taken revenge for me with Le Cheng and Zhao Mu!"

Xiang Shaolong dare not look straight at her. He respectfully said, "That is my responsibility! If Empress has other wishes that I cannot fulfil, it is my fault and not yours."

Zhu Ji reproached, "Even you are playing games with me. Everyone is respectful and fearful of me now. If you, my confidante, are really afraid of me, who else can I pour out my sorrows? Lu Buwei is avoiding me like the plague and you are following his example!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "The most fearful place in the world is the royal palace. Doesn't Empress know that someone is trying very hard to replace you mother and son?"

Zhu Ji's mouth curled up in a smile. She casually mentioned, "In terms of scheming, I have my fair share of experience. Grand Tutor Xiang need not be worried."

She giggled, "Do not behave as if I am always trying to seduce you! Although life in the palace is boring, I am satisfied to just watch Zheng'er grow up and do not care about other things."

If this discussion carries on, something bad will happen. Xiang Shaolong changed the topic and asked, "Who is actually coveting this throne?"

Zhu Ji batted an eye at him. After a short moment of reflection, she replied with disdain, "Most of the Qin officials are amiable. Only those in Lord Gao Ling's camp and Lord Yangquan's camp are hostile towards us mother and son. The others are either bribed by Lu Buwei or just onlookers. I don't believe they are capable of anything drastic."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Who is Lord Gao Ling?"

Zhu Ji replied, "Lord Gao Ling is Ying. Originally, he is supposed to be the next King of Qin. Due to Lady Hua Yang intervention, Zhuangxiang was crowned King and Ying was conferred as the Lord of Gao Ling. The traitorous Du Cang has been fanning the hatred in his heart. Thus, Ying has been spreading rumours that Lu Buwei and Zhuangxiang caused the death of the late King. He possesses ulterior motives. At the end of the day, he just wants the throne for himself!"

An important meeting was held in the main hall of the Wu Residence before their departure.

Wu Yingyuan started, "This coming year shall be a challenging period for us since we come to Xianyang. Not only is Shaolong away, Premier Lu has to lead an expedition to Eastern Zhou. Only Master Tu is left to hold the fort in Premier Residence and he may be overwhelmed by work. Luckily, I have cultivated many supportive relationships over

the past year. As long as we maintain a low profile, everything should be fine.”

Teng Yi updated Xiang Shaolong, “We have discussed this earlier. Big Brother Wu Zhuo and Wu Guo will stay behind and assist in managing the residence. In case of any trouble, we are not powerless. During this time, we will send most of our men back to the farms and avoid all the issues happening in Xianyang City.”

Xiang Shaolong suggested, “Why don’t Second Brother stay back as well? Sister-in-law is giving birth soon and ...”

Teng Yi interrupted, “Speak no further. This trip seems simple but it is hard to predict the reactions of the six states. If I stay behind, how can I sleep peacefully at night?”

Hearing the two words ‘giving birth’, everyone has an uncomfortable expression on their face, especially Wu Yingyuan.

Xiang Shaolong is feeling bad that his failure to impregnate Wu Tingfang is becoming more and more obvious.

Back in the 21st century, he can undergo hospital checks to find out the real reason. During these ancient times, everyone is equally ignorant.

Wu Zhuo sighed, “I regret not being able to accompany Third Brother on this trip but there is no other choice. Ai!”

Tao Fang added, “Your elder brothers have selected twelve of the best fighters from the elite brothers to be your personal escorts. Every one of them can fight ten men and

will be of great help to you. Shaolong must never travel anywhere alone. There are many people who cannot wait to get rid of you. I heard that Lord Yangquan has sent a top assassin to assassinate you during this trip. He wants to get rid of this thorn in his flesh and affect Lu Buwei's standing as well. Shaolong please be cautious."

Xiang Shaolong nodded.

Wu Yingyuan sighed, "Is Shaolong really bringing Tingfang and Princess Qin with you?"

Tao Fang suggested, "Why don't you bring Chun Ying and her fellow maids with you? They can wait on the three madams."

Xiang Shaolong happily agreed and reminded himself to guard against Lord Yangquan.

Wu Yingyuan remarked, "Premier Lu has spoken to me about this trip. He will present you with various valuables and three thousand pieces of gold as bribes for this trip. On our side, we will prepare a hundred top quality horses, a group of courtesans, and an additional three thousand pieces of gold. This should help Shaolong satisfy the appetite of those greedy men."

Hearing this, Jing Jun was amazed, "This can feed me for ten lifetimes!"

Teng Yi was downcast when he heard about giving courtesans as gifts.

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Any gift is fine but I am not comfortable with giving courtesans as gifts. Can Father-in-law exclude this item?"

Wu Yingyuan is slightly surprised. After staring at Xiang Shaolong for a while, he nodded, "Since Shaolong has such a weird dislike, I will not force you."

More discussions are held and the meeting was concluded.

Ji Yanran happened to come back home and is received by Wu Tingfang and Zhao Qian. They were chatting about the proud and cold widow Qin Qing.

Somehow, Xiang Shaolong is not keen to hear anything that concerns her.

Ting Fangshi's early death has made him more conscious about the heavy burden of a serious relationship. From the viewpoint of a 21st century custom of monogamy, his three wives are making him feel like the luckiest man on earth. Moreover, there is still Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi waiting for him at Daliang.

Enough!

He does not want to be distracted by women anymore.

His only wish is to help Xiao Pan ascend the throne and control Qin. He will be able to retire and live the rest of his life in complete bliss.

Out of nowhere, he is beginning to feel exhausted.

When Xiang Shaolong got up, he entered the palace and taught Xiao Pan and Wang Ben how to fight with their bare hands. While he is away, they can continue to practise.

The snow has stopped the night before and the weather is beautiful. The winter wonderland is tremendously pleasing to look at.

Others may not find it special but he, Xiang Shaolong, is from another time zone. These snow-capped ancient looking palace constructions is causing him to immerse in his surrounding and forgetting who he is.

His past is like a dream. His present life is like another dream.

Sitting alone in the pavilion, he watched Xiao Pan and Wang Ben as they sparred. The boys were enjoying their session when Qin Qing's sweet voice sounded behind him, "Ai! Grand Tutor Xiang! Prince Zheng has forgotten the time again."

Xiang Shaolong was rudely awaken from his day dreaming. Turning back, he saw Qin Qing dressed in a yellowish-purple gown with a white and fluffy cloak. She gazed peacefully at Xiao Pan and Wang Ben.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly stood up and greeted, "Good Morning Grand Tutor Qin. Let me fetch the Crown Prince."

Qin Qing's eyes turned to him and she greeted him in return. Shaking her head, she objected, "The Crown Prince is enjoying himself very much and Grand Tutor Xiang has made

an effort to come all the way here. We shall let him skip today's lesson."

Xiang Shaolong remembered that more political infighting will take place tomorrow. He sat down and plainly invited, "Grand Tutor Qin, please have a seat!"

Surprisingly, Qin Qing obediently sat down on the other side of the stone table. She softly commented, "The Crown Prince seems to favour you. With you around, he is much happier. On normal days, he will be so quiet unlike kids of his age. He seems to carrying a lot of mental burden and I feel so sad for him."

Xiang Shaolong thought of Zhao Ni and was depressed so he kept his silence.

By now, Wang Ben is gaining the upper hand on Xiao Pan. He dare not defeat the Crown Prince and Xiao Pan tripped him instead. With Wang Ben flat on his face, the victorious Xiao Pan cheered loudly.

Xiang Shaolong roared, "Come here!"

Wang Ben flipped up agilely and went to the pavilion joyfully with Xiao Pan.

Xiang Shaolong interrogated Wang Ben, "You were gaining the upper hand earlier, why did you miss the opportunity?"

Wang Ben looked at Xiao Pan awkwardly and lowered his head confessing, "I will get killed for offending the Crown Prince!"

Xiao Pan was astonished and exclaimed, "What! Why did you give in to me?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "What do you expect? You are the Crown Prince! But if you follow my method to practice, you will not get hurt easily. The next time you are fighting close combat, you can fight on a thick layer of straw mats. That will prevent any injuries. Before you practise, do plenty of warm-ups and you will be safe. Clear?"

Both boys expressed their affirmation and rushed off to practise with their swords.

Xiang Shaolong turned back to Qin Qing and smiled, "Kids are the most adorable. However, one day, they will be like us and lose the innocence they have to enjoy life to the fullest. Then, I will feel that reality is cruel."

Qin Qing was in a daze. After a moment of thinking, she remarked, "Grand Tutor Xiang seems to be tired of life!"

Xiang Shaolong was becoming emotional. Sighing, he did not reply her.

On the other hand, Qin Qing could not hold back and had to ask, "I have never seen anyone who dares to speak to the Crown Prince the way that you do. Most people could not wait to get into his good books instead. Does Grand Tutor Xiang not cherish the official position and power you have currently?"

Xiang Shaolong is secretly alarmed that Qin Qing is beginning to be interested in him. This love must not grow. He



wonders if she sees him in a different light after meeting Ji Yanran yesterday.

Thinking of this, he casually commented, "Life is only a few decades long. I cannot be bothered and do whatever I think is correct. Otherwise, life will be boring."

He stood up and paid his respects, "I have to pack my luggage. I'll see you next time."

Qin Qing cannot imagine that he will take the initiative to leave first. Fumbling, she stood up and returned the gesture.

Xiang Shaolong left the pavilion and had taken two steps towards Xiao Pan when Qin Qing yelled out behind him, "Grand Tutor Xiang!"

Xiang Shaolong was astounded and turned around. Qin Qing lowered her beautiful head and wished, "The story about a drop of honey was brilliant. I understand the meaning of it. Have a safe journey!"

Her face reddening, she turned around and left.

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly to himself. Later, he must interrogate Ji Yanran and find out what other secrets have she revealed to this lady who is as beautiful as herself.

## CHAPTER 5

### Analyzing the Situation

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

THREE DAYS before Lu Buwei is leading the army to invade Eastern Zhou; Xiang Shaolong left Xianyang with his team and travelled east towards the Yellow River. They were protected by one thousand elite Qin soldiers.

Except for Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang, Zhao Qian, Teng Yi and Jing Jun, the other representatives from the Wu Family are the twelve elite brothers. Despite their limited number, everyone is highly skilled and should not be taken lightly.

From Lu Buwei's side are Li Si, Xiao Yuetan and three hundred family warriors. These men report directly to Xiao Yuetan. Luckily, this talented man is on fantastic terms with Xiang Shaolong and there should be no conflict of power.

Of course there are Meng Ao's sons Meng Wu and Meng Tian. Despite their young age, they are full of respect for Xiang Shaolong. Teng Yi and the rest doted on them as well.

The leader of the soldiers is Major Lu Xiong, a relative of Lu Buwei. He appears to be respectful towards Xiang Shaolong but he has shifty eyes and Xiang Shaolong did not have a good impression of him. Since they are travelling together, he can only pretend to be courteous towards him as well.

Compared to the trip to Zhao, they have more men but Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi felt that they were less powerful instead.

They reached the west bank of the river and will soon cross into Han's border.

The river is flowing to the east and the surrounding hills are different in height. Overall, the scenery is mesmerizing.

The snow fall has resumed last night after stopping for five days. Everyone started to put on their fur coats. Dressed in their snow white fur coats, the three girls are as pretty as Barbie dolls.

They are happy to be part of the trip and pointed at the different sceneries and are chatting with enjoyment. Chun Ying and her three fellow maids are travelling behind them.

Along the way, Li Si mixed among the family warriors of Lu Buwei so as to avoid letting Xiao Yuetan learn about the special relationship he has with Xiang Shaolong.

At evening time, they camped on a high ground between the river and a red pine forest. They are prepared to cross the river tomorrow morning.

Lu Xiong sent a few hundred men to find wood to build rafts. Sounds of chopping wood and grunting can be heard from the forest.

While the maids are managing the tents, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi strolled along the river.

Although the weather is extremely cold, the river did not turn into ice. Since the air is cold and the water is warm, the river water evaporates and crystallizes into ice on the tree branches along the river. It is a miracle to see these silvery white crystals hanging like a Christmas decoration.

With a beautiful picture laid in front of them, neither of them wanted to say anything.

As they stepped onto the soft snow, a light squishing sound can be heard. Looking at the snowy forest and the snowflakes dancing in the air, all their worries are gone with the wind.

Unknowingly, they have left the camp boundaries.

Footsteps can be heard from behind. As they turned around, Li Si appeared among the white background.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi caught each other's eye, knowing that Li Si is not here for an idle chat.

Teng Yi laughed, "Is it cold?"

Li Si hands are hidden in the sleeves of his outer robe. When he breathes, the air leaving his mouth is whitish. He came directly in front of Xiang Shaolong. Looking up at the flying snow and looking back at the red pine forest, he shared, "This red pine tree is highly resistant to bugs and is very good for building houses or furniture. It can be made into turpentine as well and be used for lamps."

Surprised, Teng Yi stated, "I was born in the wilderness and naturally knew about this tree. I did not expect Brother Li to know this as well."

Li Si smiled, "Travelling ten thousand miles is better than reading ten thousand books. Since young, I love to travel and learn at the same time. I also make friends with capable people and learn from them. The more you ask the more you know. Brother Teng, please don't laugh at me."

Xiang Shaolong was impressed with his elegant speech, knowledge and experience. No wonder he can help Xiao Pan unite the world. Clapping him lightly on his shoulder, he suggested, "Let's continue to explore this area!"

Li Si nodded his head happily and they proceeded to walk upstream.

Teng Yi pointed at the icicles hanging on the trees and commented, "When the sun is up, these icicles will fall to the ground like flowers. That will be a rare sight."

Xiang Shaolong saw that Li Si is unresponsive. After a quick contemplation, he is certain that Li Si has something to say. He sincerely asked, "We are all brothers of the same family. If Brother Li has anything on his mind, feel free to say it!"

Li Si smiled, "Both brothers are farsighted and knowledgeable. What is your opinion of the six states?"

Teng Yi laughed, "Brother Li is a scholar and we are unrefined boors. Why don't you enlighten us instead?"

Li Si expressed his modesty and explained, "Both brothers must not laugh at me. I love to fantasize but there is something I cannot explain. The six states are Qi, Chu, Yan, Zhao, Wei and Han. Except for Han who is always the weakest, the other five states have had a period of prosperity and power and many talented men in service. Why have they been unable to unite the world?"

Both Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi are flabbergasted. This theory sounds simple; if you cannot defeat the other states, you cannot conquer their lands. But to find a really convincing reason is harder than it looks.

Li Si stopped speaking. Watching the river flow below him, his eyes shone with wisdom. Recollecting a memory, he leisurely said, "On an evening three years ago, I witnessed a strange event at the border of Wei and Chu. There was a bunch of frogs stuck in a dry well. For some reason, they

begin to fight among themselves. There were some stronger frogs who won every fight. When all the weak frogs are dead, the strong frogs begin fighting among themselves. By then, all the frogs are weak and injured. Even the last frog died because of excessive bleeding. I was enlightened that the six states are like the frogs in the well. Limited by the environment and fighting relentlessly, they will be defeated and killed. I was motivated to relocate to Qin to try my luck. There was only one thing on my mind, Only Qin, the frog who is watching the fight outside the well, will be the last and final winner.”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi nodded in agreement. This analogy explains why Qin can eventually catch up and annihilate the other six states. Qin is further away in the west and is unaffected by the constant inter-state battles.

Li Si has been deprived of a chance to showcase his talent. Now that he has started speaking, he continued to reveal, “Originally, Chu has the best chance to conquer all the lands. Chu is in the south where the land is the most fertile. After King Zi Hui conquered Chen, Cai, Qi and Ju province, they gained a huge amount of territory. But because they have plenty of resources, they lead very comfortable lives and the population became extravagant and rotten. Although they are rich, they lack quality. They have a huge army but neglect their training so the army cannot withstand a real war.”

Teng Yi nodded his head, “Well said, Brother Li. The people of Chu are arrogant and unrealistic. The recent generations

of kings have been hugely unpopular and the Chu officials are always busy fighting or scheming among themselves. The citizens have lost confidence in their government and many parts of their city are in a state of disrepair.”

Xiang Shaolong thought of Li Yuan and Lord Chunshen and sighed.

Li Si continued, “If we only focus on military competency, Zhao is the most promising among the six states. They have over two thousand miles of territory, thousands of chariots, tens of thousands of soldiers and horses. They are protected by mountains in the west, River Zheng in the south, River Qing in the east and facing Yan in the north. When Zhao’s King Wuling ascended the throne, he abolished traditions and revolutionised the army uniforms and methods of war. Zhao was invincible. Unfortunately, he is succeeded by incompetent leaders and Zhao can only rely on Lian Po and Li Mu to hold off the enemies. The battle of Changping is most regrettable. Like the frogs in the well, no matter how strong you are, once you have a bleeding wound, you will bleed to death.”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi are feeling perplexed. Is Li Si here to exhibit his observations?

Teng Yi spoke up, “Han has always been weak. Yan is facing the Xiong Nu in the north and Qi, Chu in the south. Although Prince Dan of Yan is highly talented, he’s hands are still tied. Prince Xinling of Wei and Tian Dan of Qi are the remaining



talents who can still pose a threat to us. What does Brother Li think?"

Li Si smiled, "No matter how strong they are, they are still two injured frogs in the well!"

Pausing for a while, he calmly explained, "Prince Xinling's injury is that the Wei King is prejudiced against him and limits his progress. Tian Dan's injury is the attitude of the Qi citizens."

Xiang Shaolong remembered that Li Si has studied under Qi's Xunzi, he was curious and requested, "Please elaborate!"

With his two hands behind his back, Li Si continued to walk upstream.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi caught each other's eyes. They felt that this down and out scholar seems to have become a different person who is on top of the whole world. They hurried to his two sides.

Li Si is unaware that he is now the centre of attention. Raising his head, he breathed heavily with pride and explained, "Qi is only good at boasting. Hei! Seriously, I used to indulge in some boasting as well. Don't even talk about the other schools; right in the place where I studied, there are thousands of scholars. If they debate about politics, arts, philosophy, etc, no one is their match. If we talk about fielding an army to fight a war, no one has the interests or the ability. Tian Dan may have risen to power and prevent the destruction of the country but circumstances have

changed. Those empty-talkers are just not bothered to challenge him.”

Turning to face Xiang Shaolong, he suggested, “Grand Tutor’s mission is to prevent the six states from allying. If we focus on Qi first, it will be much more effective. As long as Qi cowers like a tortoise, Chu will not act rashly. With Qi and Chu out of the picture, Zhao and Yan embroiled in a war, what can Wei accomplish on its own?”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi are stunned. They finally understood the real intention of Li Si’s words. He is hinting that the first target should be Qi instead of Wei.

They were anxious to meet up with Zhao Ya and Zhao Zhi but this matter is too important. Personal issues that do not affect the mission have to be put aside. With this turn of events, they have to reassess their entire planning.

Xiang Shaolong sighed, “Brother Li is wise and farsighted. I am truly enlightened by your words. Let’s change our route to Qi and then to Chu and complete our mission.”

They proceed to discuss about Qi’s issues before returning back to camp.

Xiang Shaolong immediately summoned Xiao Yuetan and Lu Xiong into his tent. He instructed them to change the first destination to Qi but did not explain why.

Xiao Yuetan seriously stated, “In this case, I will immediately send someone to notify Qi about our arrival. Zhao is not as weak as Han. Shall we make ourselves known and ask for

permission to cross their country? If we just cross without informing Zhao of our presence, we may incur their anger.”

This advice sounds reasonable. Xiang Shaolong has decided to change the journey without much consideration as there is limited time for him to think about all the details. Listening to Xiao Yuetan’s words, he could feel a headache coming and is momentarily undecided.

The relations between Zhao and Qi are strained. If he went ahead to conspire with Qi and ignored Zhao, Empress Jing may be annoyed and send Li Mu after them. Then they will be in deep shit.

Lu Xiong’s countenance changed slightly and commented, “Premier Lu has indicated that the first destination should be Wei’s capital of Daliang. The entire journey has been planned accordingly. If we just change our plans because of Grand Tutor, it may affect our strategies and the morale of our army. The roads ahead are treacherous. Can Grand Tutor stick to the original plan instead?”

Xiang Shaolong thought that he is over sensitive but he does have some misgivings too. He did not know what to say and kept quiet.

Xiao Yuetan chose to side with Xiang Shaolong and reminded, “I am afraid that General has misunderstood Premier’s intention. Premier has instructed us that when we leave Xianyang City, Grand Tutor will assume full leadership and responsibilities. Since Grand Tutor has decided to change the destination to Qi, there must be a deep meaning

behind it. General Lu should make his arrangements accordingly.”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were surprised that Xiao Yuetan is so harsh on Lu Xiong.

Lu Xiong's reaction is even stranger. Respectfully, he nodded, “I am muddle-headed. I will immediately discuss this with Qu Douqi. Once I have the initial arrangements, I will report to Grand Tutor and Mister Xiao again.”

Xiao Yuetan watched as he left. His eyes full of disdain, he let out a cold snort.

Xiang Shaolong remarked, “Brother Xiao seems to be dissatisfied with this man!”

Shaking his head, Xiao Yuetan sighed again, “Given Premier Lu's brilliance, I cannot understand why he has chosen this man to lead the army. Lu Xiong is incompetent and often takes short cuts to achieve his goals. As a result, many of us are not won over by his conduct and refuse to submit to him. In the past when Master Tu and I were running errands for Master Lu, this group of clansmen are nowhere to be seen. When Master Lu was appointed as Premier, they start to come forward to acknowledge him. Ironically, Master Lu gave them a good share of responsibilities.”

Xiang Shaolong finally comprehended their relationships between one another.

Within Lu Buwei's subordinates, there are generally divided into two camps. One camp is lead by Master Tu and Xiao

Yuetan while the other camp consists of Lu Buwei's clansmen, including Lu Xiong. They are bickering with each other for Lu Buwei's recognition.

The earlier mentioned Qu Douqi is another army Major. A true-blue Qin citizen, he is Meng Ao's trusted follower. Despite being Lu Xiong's assistant, his prestige and accomplishments in the army are far better than what Lu Xiong can ever hope to achieve.

You cannot avoid confrontations.

Even a small faction of one thousand men can create such complicated issues.

Xiao Yuetan enquired in a low voice, "Shaolong, why did you suddenly change the travelling route? Are you concerned that Lord Yangquan has collaborated with Han to ambush us on the roads?"

Xiang Shaolong had not thought about that. If he told Xiao Yuetan about his secret conversation with Li Si, it may raise some suspicions. He took the chance to divulge, "This is one of the reasons. I went to find Mister Li earlier and questioned him about the situation in Qi. The people of Qi are easily persuaded so I decided to proceed to Qi first."

Xiao Yuetan was jubilant, "I see. Shaolong is really good at judging people. Li Si has travelled widely and is well-informed about many people and places. It is too bad that he has not gained the favour of Premier nor given opportunities to perform."

He added, "Now I understand why Shaolong requested that Li Si join us on this trip!"

Teng Yi interrupted, "Is Lu Xiong reliable?"

Xiao Yuetan sighed, "This is hard to say. Basically, everything is going along well but if something happens, no one is above suspicion."

Pausing for a while, he added, "Shaolong is my personal friend and I am not afraid to let you know about this. A big disagreement came about when we were planning our manpower for this trip. Master Tu and I wanted you to head this mission while Lu Xiong's clansmen wanted Madam Lu's brother Zhu Meng instead. After Premier reconsidered the importance of this mission, he decided to follow our recommendation but the relationship has deteriorated already."

Xiang Shaolong thought that he did not mind not being chosen for this trip. But it is too late now. He has already started his mission and wasted his energy. Sighing together with Xiao Yuetan, he smiled bitterly.

Xiao Yuetan sincerely pleaded, "Master Tu and I knew that Shaolong is no someone who hankers after fame or fortune. However, we are now at loggerheads with the clansmen headed by Zhu Meng. Shaolong must help us vent our frustrations."

Xiang Shaolong realised that he is a hot favourite with Master Tu's camp and found it hilarious.

Outside the tent, sounds of weapons clashing and cheering can be heard. Puzzled, the three men went outside to take a look.

On an open space outside the main tent, an armoured Ji Yanran was engaging Meng Tian in a spear duel. The fight is tremendously exhilarating.

Wu Tingfang, Zhao Qian, Meng Wu, Jing Jun and the elite brothers are cheering at the side. The atmosphere is extremely lively.

Ji Yanran may have gained the upper hand but Meng Tian persisted hard to deflect her blows.

Teng Yi could not imagine that this seventeen year-old is such a good fighter and cheered for him as well.

Meng Tian saw Xiang Shaolong watching the fight. Motivated, he attacked three times in succession and gained some advantages.

Ji Yanran parried his strong spear to the side. When Meng Tian lost his footing, she retreated and sheathes her spear on her back. She smiled charmingly, "In time to come, I will not be your match!"

Meng Tian hurriedly expressed his respects and modesty and everyone was exhilarated.

Sounds of footsteps can be heard. With a proud look on his face, Lu Xiong was leading an irritated Qu Douqi towards them.

The three men exchanged glances, knowing that Lu Xiong has stirred up trouble and instigated Qu Douqi to reject the changes.

The two of them came in front of Xiang Shaolong. Before they could speak, Xiang Shaolong intercepted with a smile, "Since the journey started, I have yet to know Major Qu better. Come! "

He turned around and entered his tent.

Qu Douqi is taken by surprise and followed him in.

Just as Lu Xiong was about to enter the tent as well, he was detained by Teng Yi. He courteously invited, "General Lu must have some idea about the new travel plan. Grand Tutor has ordered me to go through the details with general. Why don't we talk about it in my tent?"

Lu Xiong can only follow him helplessly to his tent.

Only Xiao Yuetan was left there smiling and stroking his beard.



## CHAPTER 6

## Panic

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHEN the two men are properly seated, Qu Douqi's face tightened as he inquired, "I heard Grand Tutor is making a last minute decision to alter the journey. May I know the reason?"

Xiang Shaolong thought, Even King Zhuangxiang has given him a free hand to do whatever he wants, why am I being questioned by a Major? He recognizes that he has no authority within the Qin army. He is at most a civil official and Lu Buwei's assistant.

Checking his temper, he turned the tables, “Has Major Qu heard about Lord Yangquan’s plot against us?”

Qu Douqi pretended to realised what is going on and replied, “If this is your concern, Grand Tutor can rest assured. Master Meng Ao has given instructions. I have deployed riders over the past ten days to scout our surroundings. If there is anyone trailing us, I will be the first to know.”

Xiang Shaolong smiled, “Has Major Qu know that this travel route has been fixed a long time ago?”

Qu Duo Qi is a smart man and knows the meaning behind this question. He answered, “Although the route has been fixed a long time ago, except for myself, General Lu and Grand Tutor, even Premier Lu has no idea about the details. So Grand Tutor need not worry about someone leaking out our travel route. ”

Xiang Shaolong wanted to tell Qu Douqi that he will do whatever he wants and it is not up to him to challenge. Ultimately, he swallowed his pride and plainly state, “All we need is a spy who will leave clues for the enemy to follow us. When they find a right spot, they will ambush us. These areas near the Han border are especially dangerous.”

Unaffected, Qu Douqi countered, “In this case, we will still be ambushed even if we change the route. They can also ambush us near the Zhao border. I suggest we stick to the old route. Even if we are defeated, we can still escape.”

Xiang Shaolong curiously mentioned, “Major Qu is strongly against my changing of the route. May I know the reason?”

This is a great move. If Qu Douqi cannot explain himself, Xiang Shaolong can punish him for disobeying martial law.

Qu Douqi was slightly taken aback. His eyes shining with anger, he coldly replied, "Master Meng has given me the responsibility of ensuring the safety of Grand Tutor. I will naturally put safety as my top priority."

Xiang Shaolong was pissed and coldly smiled, "Now, I am not sure who is in charge, Major Lu or you? Earlier, he has received my command but now, you seemed to disregard it. Can you explain yourself?"

Qu Douqi was shaken, knowing the Xiang Shaolong is mad at him. Softening his voice, he humbly said, "I dare not disobey your order, but..."

Xiang Shaolong impatiently cut him off, "We are crossing the river tomorrow. Have you sent someone to swim over and have a look?"

Qu Douqi was dumbfounded. He uttered, "The rafts are not ready and the water is so cold..."

Xiang Shaolong stood up in a huff and went to the opening of the tent. "Jing Jun!" He shouted.

Jing Jun stopped his swords duel with Meng Wu immediately. Walking over, he responded, "What orders does Grand Tutor have?"

Xiang Shaolong commanded, "Find a few brothers at once and swim opposite the river. Check on the surroundings and

remain discreet. If there are any discoveries, do not alert the enemy. Clear?"

Jing Jun happily received the order and left to execute it.

Qu Douqi lowered his head with dissatisfaction. Xiang Shaolong's action is to highlight his inadequacy and negligence.

Xiang Shaolong was amused. They came well prepared and one of their secret weapons is the waterproof wet suit made according to Shan Rou's specifications. He did not expect to use it so soon.

Originally, he did not want to investigate what is opposite the river. He was reminded by Xiao Yuetan that Lord Yangquan may send someone to assassinate him. While bickering with this disrespectful Qu Douqi, he was inspired to use this method to put him down.

Since he will not accept reasoning, Xiang Shaolong will use hard tactics and force him to submit.

Insubordination is a big military taboo.

If Qu Douqi or Lu Xiong continue to create problems, he will make use of King Zhuangxiang military decree to dismiss both of them and put Teng Yi in charge.

He is no longer interested to argue with this man. He icily said, "That's all. Major Qu can continue to do whatever you are doing. Except for you and Lu Xiong, not a third person must know about the route change. Violators will be dealt

according to military law. Tomorrow morning, I will tell you which path to take.”

Qu Douqi kept quiet and stood up. Bowing to Xiang Shaolong, he left unhappily.

The sky is darkening

After Xiang Shaolong finished explaining the reason for changing the destination to Qi, Ji Yanran marvelled, “Mister Li Si is indeed extraordinary to analyze the six states so meticulously. He is especially experienced with the Qi people to know about their boasting and debating culture. I did not expect there to be such a man in Premier’s residence. Can Shaolong introduce him to me?”

Xiang Shaolong understood her character and is happy to have someone chat with her. He nodded, “I will invite him later to meet you.”

Ji Yanran joyfully cooed; “What surprised me even more was your foresight. You intentionally got him to join our trip.” Xiang Shaolong was feeling guilty. What foresight does he possess?

Zhao Qian was worried, “But hubby has informed Lady Ya in Daliang and they are waiting for us. If we go to Qi and Chu first, wouldn’t they have to wait like an idiot for a long time?”

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, “This cannot be helped. I will send Jing Jun to find them in Daliang first. When we are

leaving Qi for Chu, we can meet them halfway. At most, it will be a three month wait!”

Zhao Qian thought that this is reasonable and kept quiet.

At this moment, Xia Ying added some rice for Xiang Shaolong. He smiled and asked her if the journey is manageable.

On the other side, Qui Ying laughed, “When we were in Xianyang City, Miss taught us to ride horses and practice archery. This trip is easy compared to what we do!”

Wu Tingfang smiled and proudly state, “Under my training, these ladies are doing very well.”

Abruptly, disturbing noises can be heard from outside the tent. Teng Yi shouted from outside, “Third Brother, please come out!”

Xiang Shaolong noticed that his tone is heavy. Sometime must be amiss and he dashed out from his tent.

A crowd is forming near the empty area near his tent. Even Lu Xiong and Qu Douqi were present.

Jing Jun had just come back from the spying and excitedly exclaimed, “Grand Tutor! We have captured an enemy soldier. Please do not hold it against me. The moment we got out of the water, we ran into this fellow relieving himself. We were forced to act.”

Xiang Shaolong was traumatized. He looked over to the crowd and everyone has a serious expression on their faces. Qu Douqi's face is guilt-stricken.

Wu Yanzhu and Wu Shu, leaders of the twelve elite brothers brought a man before Xiang Shaolong and forced him to kneel down. The man is wearing farming clothes and his hands are bound behind him. Still dripping wet, his face is deathly grey due to the cold.

In a deep voice, Teng Yi questioned, "Who are you?"

His lips shivering, the spy lowered his head and rudely shot, "My name is Deng Jia, a Han farmer. I was just passing by. Why did you resort to force and imprison me?"

Still in his wet suit, Jing Jun countered, "Don't believe him. He is armed with a sword, a bow and arrows. He is up to no good."

Teng Yi passed a sword to Xiang Shaolong and commented, "From the design of the sword, this man is likely to be from Yan."

On his side, Xiao Yuetan exclaimed, "What!?"

Xiang Shaolong was blown away as well. He did not forecast his enemy to be related to Yan. Puzzled, he thought hard and ordered, "Get him some dry clothes. I'll personally interrogate him."

Wu Yanzhu and Wu Shu received the order and dragged the spy away.

Xiang Shaolong faced the onlooker soldiers and coldly snorted, "Get back to your posts and be extra alert. Will the two majors, please stay behind." Turning to Ji Yanran and company, he instructed, "Please wait for me in the tent."

Only Teng Yi, Jing Jun, Xiao Yuetan, Lu Xiong and Qu Douqi were left. Xiang Shaolong simply mentioned, "If this man is really from Yan, we are in serious danger."

Everyone is dead serious and kept quiet.

Under the illumination of the camp lanterns, the snow continue to fall and the atmosphere is solemn.

Qu Douqi gave a dry cough and kneeled down begging, "I have neglected my duties and am willing to accept Grand Tutor's punishment."

Lu Xiong could only helpless kneel down and beg for mercy as well.

Xiang Shaolong was glad at this turn of events. Unwittingly, he managed to put down these two men. However, they are in danger now and he cannot be as happy as he wanted. Stepping forward to help them up, he promised, "As long as we work together to manage this crisis, I will not begrudge you."

His underlying meaning is, If you go against me, I will make sure you regret it.

Both men resembled the proud cock that has just lost the cock fight. They stood there crestfallen.



Xiao Yuetan advised, "Let's discuss further after we have interrogated Deng Jia! But if I am in his shoes, I will not confess. If I confess, it is as good as signing my own death warrant."

Teng Yi smiled, "Leave this to me. Fortunately, the weather has just turned cold. Let me go digging in the nearby burrows to see if I can find a helper."

Finishing, he left the camp, leaving everyone bewildered.

As Xiao Yuetan had foretold, Deng Jia refused to admit that he is a spy.

Xiang Shaolong knew Teng Yi very well and is certain that he has a good plan. He prevented Qu Douqi and the rest from torturing him and tied him in one of the tents with an elite brother standing guard.

In a short while, Teng Yi returned with a cloth sack. The sack contains something soft.

Everyone in the tent including Xiang Shaolong was mystified. Only Jing Jun understood. Laughing, he left saying, "Let me get a small basket!"

Teng Yi ordered his men, "Get him to stand up!"

Wu Yanzhu and Wu Shu supported Deng Jia up on two sides.

Deng Jia was horror-struck. Staring at Teng Yi holding the cloth sack in front of his face, he was also unsure about that animal moving in the cloth sack.

Qu Douqi enquired, "What does Mister Teng plan to do?"

Teng Yi put his hand into the sack without hesitation. His well-trained hands produced a black and fluffy field rat. Holding the rat to Deng Jia's face, he smiled, "Are you confessing or not?"

Watching the struggling and squealing giant field rat held up by Teng Yi, even the clever Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Yuetan had no idea how this will help in getting a confession.

Deng Jia arrogantly countered, "I am just a farmer. What is there to confess?"

Xiao Yuetan icily smiled, "You had better confess. You have a Yan accent when you speak. Moreover, a farmer in your shoes will be frightened to death and not arrogant like you. Who are you still trying to deceive?"

Deng Jia heard his words and realised that he has revealed his background. He persisted, "I have no idea what you are talking about. If you still do not believe me, feel free to check the Deng village opposite the river."

In this instant, Jing Jun returned with the bamboo basket. "Take off his pants!" he cried.

Everyone present was stunned.

In a few quick movements, Wu Yanzhu did as instructed. Deng Jia was half naked below the waist and everyone look on.

Jing Jun personally cover his groin area with the bamboo basket. Using a rope that goes behind to Deng Jia's buttocks, he secured the basket.

Deng Jia was terrified, "What are you trying to do!?"

Teng Yi smiled, "You will know in a short while." To Wu Yanzhu and Wu Shu, he ordered, "Hold him in a seated position!"

Everyone finally understood and was convinced that his method is a hundred times more malicious than beating him up.

Teng Yi lifted a cover on the side of the basket. Putting the rat into the basket, he shut the cover.

As the rat was moving inside, the basket and Deng Jia started to shake violently.

Deng Jia screamed, "Xiang Shaolong, you are so vicious!"

Squatting down, Lu Xiong questioned, "How does Brother Deng Jia know that he is Xiang Shaolong?"

Deng Jia knew that he has let the cat out of the bag but he cannot be bothered to answer him. His eyes followed the rat as it moves around inside the basket.

Among those in the tent, he has the best experience in 'interacting' with the field rat.

Squatting down besides Lu Xiong, Xiang Shaolong patted his face and softly coaxed, "Why don't you confess obediently. Once we have your confession, we will release you after we have left."

Teng Yi observed his heaving chest and advised in a deep voice, "When the rat is tired of walking, it will start to look for food. Don't tell you are waiting for that to happen!"

Jing Jun laughed, "By then it will be too late. The earlier you confessed, the higher chance your birth organ and urinating organ can remain intact."

Without their hard and soft tactics, Deng Jia understood what is befalling him. Petrified, he groaned, "Get this thing away from me first!"

Qu Douqi shook his head, "If you do not start confessing, that thing will stay inside the basket for good."

Xiao Yuetan smiled, "You want to drag this further? Idiot!"

Either as a result of Deng Jia being scratched or bitten, he tragically shouted, "I confess! We are here on the orders of the Prince. Get it out now!"

Xiang Shaolong knew that he has fully submitted. He winked at Teng Yi to retrieve the rat. Frankly, he himself is afraid of the rat. If he retrieves the rat himself, all his goose pimples will pop out.

Shaking his head, Teng Yi roared, "Speak!"

Without a choice, Deng Jia revealed everything he knows. Without a doubt, this is the fastest interrogation in the world.

By the time Teng Yi took out the rat, Deng Jia is totally soaked in his own sweat and urine despite the cold weather. This 'torture' strategy is truly marvellous.

From his confession, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi understood Yan's plot as well as the assassination of Lord Longyang outside Handan City.

Yan's Prince Dan has been besieged by Lian Po in the capital city. He can only hold his fort and cannot lift the siege. He was forced to send his famed general Xu Yiluan and three thousand brave soldiers to break out of the siege. They entered Zhao secretly and hope to create chaos to force Zhao to recall their soldiers.

For a start, they tried to assassinate Lord Longyang. When that failed, they killed the Qi spy and pushed the blame to Tian Dan.

When this plan failed as well, they conjured up another scheme.

Prince Dan has friends all over the world. With his well-thought strategies, he has spies in every state. He heard about Xiang Shaolong's mission to Wei and informed Xu Yiluan to disguise as Zhao soldiers to kill Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong is representing King Zhuangxiang. If he is killed, Qin will not take it lying down. When Qin attacks Zhao, the siege of Yan's capital will be lifted. What a clever plan!

Xu Yiluan is a wise and capable man. On Xiang Shaolong's journey to Wei, he deployed sentries and await the perfect opportunity. He decided to attack them as Han soldiers when they are crossing the river tomorrow. When the river crossing has failed, Xiang Shaolong will not dare to enter Han anymore. He will have to divert his route towards Zhao. In Zhao, Xu Yiluan can utilise his full army strength to ambush them. Once Xiang Shaolong is dead, their mission will be accomplished.

Everyone is frowning deeply upon hearing this news.

These Yan soldiers are not in the own country and can behave recklessly. On the other hand, Xiang Shaolong could not bear to alert Zhao and Han about their journey and create unnecessary trouble. He is very troubled about the current situation.

Besides Xu Yiluan, Lord Yangquan may have conspired with Han to destroy them. They are travelling with over one thousand men in their party. With such a huge amount of travellers, they become an easy target for any attackers. Even escaping will be difficult.

If they come across any fortifications that they can use to defend themselves, they may stay alive for the time being but will likely be trapped like a caged animal. In the end, it will be worse as they cannot visit any of the states.

Xiang Shaolong and company had a long discussion outside the tent. Nobody could think of a good idea to handle this crisis.

Qu Douqi suggested, "Since we know that Xu Yiluan is hiding in a mountain opposite the river, why don't we swim over under the cover of the night and eliminate them in a surprise attack?"

Xiao Yuetan rejected, "That is too risky. I have heard of this man. He is good at military warfare and must have soldiers spying on us in secret. The disappearance of Deng Jia will cause him to be suspicious. Moreover, their army is three times as big as ours. Rushing over now will only send us to our deaths."

Lu Xiong's face is turning green and his lips are turning white, he quavered, "Why don't we escape at once and leave our empty tents here. By the time the Yan army discovers this, we will be long gone."

Although Xiang Shaolong hated his guts, he had to agree with his plan. Nodding, he agreed, "We must definitely escape. However, we must plan how to escape. With only a thousand soldiers, we can move pretty quickly but it is only a river between us and them. They will catch up sooner or later."

Qu Douqi nodded, "No matter whether it is Zhao or Han territory that we are entering, we must be extremely careful. We must send spies to scout the roads and avoid meeting Zhao and Han soldiers. Thus, our paths will not be as smooth as we want. This will slow down our speed. An intelligent man like Xu Yiluan will catch up to us very soon."

Keep quiet all this while, Teng Yi suddenly spoke up, "I have a suggestion. We will break up our formation and divide our soldiers into smaller groups and travel on different routes. This way, the enemy will not know which group to pursue. It will also make our escape more nimble."

Everyone became quiet and digested what he had just recommended.

Xiang Shaolong concluded, "This is the best way. Let's do it."

The snow fall is getting heavier and heavier

The killing aura of the wilderness is becoming stronger and stronger.



## CHAPTER 7

## Pine Forest Ambush

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

SNOWFLAKES fell relentlessly from the sky.

On the dark snowy plains, everyone is silently packing up the tents and getting ready to leave.

Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi, Jing Jun, Xiao Yuetan, Li Si as well as the twelve elite Wu family warriors are prone on the riverbank, scanning for any suspicious activity on the opposite shore.

Beyond the black pine forest, there was no other sign of life. If not for the capture of Deng Jia and knowing the enemies' ambush from his confession, it will be hard to imagine that there were three thousands enemies spying on them with ill intentions.

Xiao Yuetan coldly snorted, "Yan really stooped so low just to relieve the siege by the Zhao army."

However, Xiang Shaolong thought that it is rather common for such despicable acts during these warring times.

Lu Xiong appeared and reported, "Grand Tutor! Everything is ready. We can set off anytime."

Xiang Shaolong gave the order to depart.

The one thousand Qin soldiers were split into two groups of five hundred each. Pulling their horses and carriages, one group went upstream while the other group went downstream. Lighting their lamps, they resembled numerous fireflies.

Ji Yanran, the other girls and the three hundred Lu Family warriors retreated among the darkness into the red pine forest.

The stillness of the night was shattered by the galloping sounds of the horses and the movement of the carriages.

Teng Yi eyed the black forest opposite the river and laughed, "If I am Xu Yiluan, I will be having a bad headache now."

Xiao Yuetan asked in a deep voice, "Will he be tricked?"

Jing Jun replied in a low voice, "We will know soon enough!"

It is difficult to navigate the paths in the dark and the armies moved at a snail's pace. It was only two hours later that both groups are considerable apart from each other.

As agreed, they will meet twenty days later at Mount Yangchang which is situated besides Qinshui and at the Zhao-Han border. If they did not meet up after three days of waiting, they will meet up again at Mount Wang Lung Ling at the Zhao-Qi border.

The Qin army has undergone strict training and everyone is highly skilled in archery and horse-riding. With a smaller force, it is much easier to escape in this uninhabited territory.

Teng Yi softly whistled, "The enemy is moving!"

Footsteps and hoof beats sounded from a hill on the opposite shore. Hundreds of torches were lit and two groups of men chased upstream and downstream like two fire dragons.

Xu Yiluan guessed that he has been discovered that there is no more need to keep hiding.

When the two fire dragons have gone far, Xiang Shaolong ordered, "Little Jun, please investigate the opposite shore again. If everyone is really gone, we will cross the river at dawn tomorrow."

Jing Jun grunted a reply and led the twelve elite Wu family warriors across the river on two hidden rafts. Li Si and Xiao Yuetan went along with them.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi returned to the red pine forest leisurely.

This surprise ambush by the Yan army has caused them some panic but everything is resolved for the moment.

Xiang Shaolong was about to say something but he interrupted by what he sees in front of him. Trembling, Teng Yi shouted, "Not good!"

The edge of the red pine forest is filled with a thousand red flaming torches. Closing in like a fan towards the centre of the forest, the air is filled with battle cries and the attack is earth-shattering.

Both men thought of the assassination of Lord Longyang. The colour disappearing from their faces, they drew their swords and ran madly towards the red pine forest.

There were at least five hundred invaders and they had approached the forest in silence. When they were discovered by the sentries of the Lu Family Warriors, they charged straight into battle.

From the start, the Yan army has ambushed Xiang Shaolong's entourage from three sides – upstream, downstream and within the red pine forest. Even if they wish to escape now, the river will block their escape.

In such freezing weather, jumping into the river is as good as committing suicide.

Their opponent employs the most vicious, bloodthirsty and well-planned strategies to kill them all.

Killing sounds filled the air as men and horses fell alike. Ji Yanran was directing the family warriors and was protecting Wu Tingfang, Zhao Qian and the four maids. Together with the Meng brothers, they escaped towards the river.

Luckily, the forest is very dense, the ground is uneven and it is dark at night. Otherwise, they would have perished under the arrows of the enemy.

However, they were being forced to the river by the attackers and they may not survive anyway.

Countless enemies are streaming over from all over. The Lu Family warriors may be top fighters and fought with their lives but the overwhelming majority of enemies soon overcome them.

Barely leaving the forest, Chun Ying gave a tragic cry. A long arrow has pierced her back and she died on the spot.

Wu Tingfang and the other maids wailed in agony.

Coolly, Ji Yanran pulled Zhao Qian and yelled, "Follow me!" Snaking through the edge of the forest, she advanced towards a small hill besides the river.

Only about a hundred warriors are with her. Half of them re-entered the forest to re-engage the enemy. The remaining

sixty-odd men covered their retreat and rushed up the hill together. The snow-covered slopes only caused their ascent to take twice as long.

Behind them, torches can be seen everywhere and the forest is shining red like blood.

On the side, ten odd enemies disguised as hunters came assaulting. Mad on her killing spree, Ji Yanran pierced continuously with her lance and killed several men in a row, creating an opening.

Another enemy chopped down at Zhao Qian who is behind Ji Yanran, disregarding the fact that she is female and powerless.

Ji Yanran's lance is embedded into another enemy's chest and cannot rescue her in time. Meng Tian who is on her right dashed over and his sword flashed, severing the man head from his body.

As they are about to reach the hilltop, a shower of arrows rained on them and another ten family warriors were felled.

The enemies scrambled over and chopped furiously at those hit by arrows to ensure their deaths.

Qiu Ying slipped and fell onto the ground.

Xia Ying and Dong Ying were as close to her as real sisters. They turned back to help her up. With this lapse, a gang of unscrupulous invaders broke through their defences and in the chaos, murdered all three of them. It was a heart-breaking sight.

Wu Tingfang nearly fainted upon seeing this. Supported by Meng Wu and Meng Tian, they reached the hilltop.

The remaining thirty family warriors utilise their advantageous terrain height and managed to hold the attackers at bay but not for long too.

At this crucial moment, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi arrived to help them. Noticing the maids' absence, they could guess what had happened.

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "Get to the river. Jing Jun is there!"

Wu Tingfang wailed, "Hubby!" Meng Wu interrupted her and dragged her away.

Ji Yanran cried, "Don't get caught up in the fighting!" Leading the four persons, they ran down slope towards the river.

Teng Yi had reached the hilltop. Waving his heavy sword, he massacred everyone in his sight.

Xiang Shaolong cut off the pursuers of Ji Yanran and began his own killing spree. The fighting is simply horrendous.

As another hundred of attackers swarmed up the hill, someone shouted, "Xiang Shaolong is here!"

Xiang Shaolong just disembowelled two men. Scanning his surrounding, he can see more enemies advancing. Except for Teng Yi, there is no other survivor. He knew that if he still continued to fight, he will meet his end here. Roaring loudly,

he brandished his sword and fought his way to Teng Yi, bellowing, "Go!"

By now, their bodies are filled with sword wounds. Teng Yi nodded and swept his sword, killing another two men.

Fighting as they retreat, they were hard pressed and found it hard to slip away.

Eyeing the countless fighters coming out of the red pine forest and climbing the hill to engage them, Xiang Shaolong called out, "Let's roll down!"

Pulling Teng Yi, they bend down and rolled down the hill slope.

Thanks to the heavy snowfall, the ground was wet and soft and they rolled safely to the bottom of the hill.

Like madmen, the Yan army chased down the hill.

As they got up, Teng Yi grunted. His right shoulder was pierced by an arrow.

Ten odd enemies are rushing over from both sides.

Xiang Shaolong pulled out his flying needles and shot them out in succession. Before they knew what happened seven men were strike dead. The remaining men scrambled to safety.

Suddenly, the fiery torches dimmed.

The snowy slope is extremely slippery. Several of the torch-bearers slipped and fell into the snow, extinguishing the flames.



Teng Yi reached behind him and held onto the arrow. Pulling the arrow out with some of his flesh and blood, he struck the arrowhead into the throat of another attacker.

With his armour protecting him, the arrow only entered his flesh by a few inches and his organs are unharmed. Otherwise, he may lose his life.

Taking advantage of the low visibility, they charged into a group of enemies and break out of the encirclement. Once freed, they sped towards the river.

Behind them, three groups of men carrying torches were trailing closely and battle cries filled their ears.

In an instance, they reached the river shore, Jing Jun leapt over and happily cried, "Let's go!"

Leading them, he ran along the river.

The first raft carrying Ji Yanran and the rest had just left. The other raft is waiting for them.

Jumping of the raft, they rowed towards the opposite shore.

As they reached the centre of the river, the pursuers came to the river bank. Taking out their bows, they rained arrows on Xiang Shaolong and company.

The twelve elite Wu Family Warriors formed a human wall and used their swords to deflect the incoming arrows.

Tragic calls were heard.

One man was hit and he fell onto Xiang Shaolong.

Grieved, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi yelled at the same time, "Get down!"

Another three men were hit by arrows.

The rafts finally left the firing range of the arrows and arrived at the opposite shore.

The enemies were cursing helpless. To think they let them escape even in such a disadvantageous situation.

Xiang Shaolong had just leapt onto shore when Wu Tingfang heartbreakingly leapt into his blood-stained embrace.

Jing Jun suddenly cry out, "Third Princess!"

Xiang Shaolong trembled uncontrollably as he looked over. Zhao Qian was in Ji Yanran's arms with an arrow protruding from her chest and she has breathed her last.

Although his wounds have been bandaged, Xiang Shaolong's heart is still bleeding. When he is fully confident about protecting his loved ones, they were killed right before his eyes. In these catastrophic times, the majority of women were dependent on men for their survival. If their men happened to be killed, they will be handed over to their conquerors. There, they will face abuses such as prostitution. Su Nu, Su'er, Zhao Ni and Ting Fangshi died first and Xiang Shaolong was informed later. He may be heartbroken but it is still better than personally witnessing Zhao Qian and the four maids dying while he stared helplessly. Recalling their usual happy demeanour, he could feel an intense hatred surging in his heart. If he had not insisted on

bringing them along, they will not suffer such a terrible ending.

Lady luck has always been on his side. From the first time he came to Handan City, the trip to Daliang to steal the Lu Gong Manual, the Wu Family escape to Qin, the capture of Zhao Mu, he has always managed to gain the upper hand in all the dangerous situations. The death of the five girls has shattered his beautiful dream. This time, he did not lose to inferior battle strategies, he lost to luck.

Witnessing the fresh graves, he cannot help but think of the exposed corpse of the four maids, the four elite Wu Family warriors who were shot dead on the raft and the three hundred faithful warriors of the Lu Buwei. For the first time ever, Xiang Shaolong was filled with the most intense murderous hatred and revenge! He will not show any mercy to Lord Yangquan or Yan. Only blood can wash away this debt of blood! Wu Tingfang is wailing loudly in the arms of the sobbing Ji Yanran, adding to his pain.

Xiao Yuetan approached Xiang Shaolong and swore in a low voice, "Grand Tutor Xiang must take it easy. When we get back to Xianyang, I will get Premier to seek revenge for us."

In this moment, Jing Jun swiftly came to the gravesite and hissed in a frantic tone, "Enemies are sighted on the south-eastern direction. I detected Lord Yangquan's men and Han soldiers. They numbered five hundred and are equipped with hunting dogs. We better leave as soon as possible."

Filled with grief, Xiang Shaolong wondered aloud, "Where can we go?"

Teng Yi reasoned, "The road to Mount Yangchang is flat ground and rivers. We do not have any war horses and will not escape their pursuit. The best way is to go through the mountains to Jing Jun's hometown, Jing village. There, we can obtain provisions and horses. We can even recruit some top hunters and add to our fighting strength. Jing Jun and I are familiar with the roads and can evade enemies' on our trail."

Xiang Shaolong forced himself to brighten up. Glancing at his two lovely wives Ji Yanran and Wu Tingfang as well as the Meng brothers, Xiao Yuetan, Li Si, Jing Jun, Teng Yi and the remaining eight elite Wu Family warriors, he decided, "Great! Let's go. As long as I, Xiang Shaolong, am alive, Lord Yangquan and his allies will not get away with this."

They travelled day and night.

Twenty five days later, after enduring several hardships and hunger, they came to Jing village.

Hunting for food during winter is extremely tough. Fortunately, Teng Yi and Jing Jun are the best in this field. It is due to these two men that Xiang Shaolong and the rest did not die of hunger in the mountains.

On a few occasions, the pursuers nearly caught up to them. It was also due to Teng Yi and Jing Jun's familiarity of the mountains that they managed to slip away each time.

By the time they got to Jing village, even strong men like Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were on the verge of collapse, not mentioning normal people and girls like Xiao Yuetan, Li Si and Wu Tingfang. Luckily, they have achieved some fitness by practising swordplay or they will not be able to hold out. However, their zombie-like appearance is still heart-rending.

Jing village comprises of ten odd clusters of huts situated all over the mountains. Teng Yi has always been the most respected hunter in the eyes of the villagers. Every kid in this village has benefitted from his horse-riding or archery lessons. Viewing his return, everyone was excited with happiness. They did their best to see to the needs of Xiang Shaolong's group and helped them to spy around for enemy activities.

After three days of rest and recuperation, everyone is fully rejuvenated and fresh. They have regained their confidence and fighting spirit.

Time can dilute everything, including burying all the unhappy events deep into the hearts.

Everyone is having lunch in the big hut of the village leader when Teng Yi brought Xiang Shaolong to the open area outside the house. Thirty eight young hunters were chatting excitedly with Jing Jun. Seeing the appearance of the two men; they stood at attention and seemed to be waiting to be selected to join them.

Xiang Shaolong asked in a low voice, "Second brother can decide for me."

Teng Yi answered, "Isn't it better for them to feel that they were selected by you the world-renowned hero?"

He continued, "None of them were originally surnamed Jing. The entire Jing village inhabitants are originally nomads from the north. They live a carefree life and do whatever they want. Due to Zhao's expansion and the Xiong Nu's harassment, they were forced to come south. After living here for hundreds of years, they were despised by the Han and were forced to change their names. Therefore, they have a great dislike for Zhao and Han."

Anger can be seen on the faces of the young hunters.

Jing Jun added, "Everyone here practises martial arts to fight raiders from the Han soldiers, horse thieves and invaders from other villages."

Teng Yi concluded, "These hunters were specially selected from a thousand hunters. They are the best. With additional training, I guarantee they will not be inferior to our elite Wu Family warriors."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is everyone willing to throw in their lot with me Xiang Shaolong?"

The hunters agreed in unison.

Xiang Shaolong swore, "From today onwards, we will share wealth and woe."

Everyone cheered wildly.

Back in the house, Teng Yi reminded, "We will set out for Huang Lung Ling tomorrow. We have lost all our precious cargo in the red pine forest. It seems inappropriate to continue our mission without any valuables."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Those are secondary."

That night, the terrible battles, the tragic cries and the intense feelings surfaced in their dreams once again.

Wu Tingfang woke up with a scream and her face is covered with tears.

Xiang Shaolong embraced her tightly and tried his best to comfort her. On the other side, Ji Yanran woke up too. She opened the window to allow more fresh air to enter the room.

After Wu Tingfang went back to sleep, Xiang Shaolong has lost all desire to sleep. He felt as if there was large boulder pressing down on his chest. "It is a beautiful night. Why don't we take a stroll?" he suggested.

Ji Yanran replied in a pitiful tone, "Fang'er cannot sleep alone. You go ahead!"

Xiang Shaolong put on a coat and left the house. Stepping into the garden and under the bright moonlight, he noticed Xiao Yuetan looking at the sky mysteriously.

Xiang Shaolong was astonished and approached him asking, "Brother Xiao cannot sleep too?"

As if he was expecting Xiang Shaolong, Xiao Yuetan continued to stare at the black sky and sighed loudly, "I love to let my thoughts wander, especially at night. Therefore, I love to hug a beauty to sleep to prevent myself from thinking too much. My bad habit came back tonight!"

Xiang Shaolong did not feel good hearing this. He continued to ask, "What is Brother Xiao thinking of?"

Xiao Yuetan shook his head and bitterly laughed, "I am thinking about Master Lu. Ever since he became Premier, he has changed a lot. It is hard to link the present him to the previous him."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "Regardless of any changes, the basic character remains the same. It is only due to different environments that people suppressed their basic nature to achieve a goal. When they no longer need to hide their true intentions, the suppressed basic nature will resurface and be dominant. This is the most obvious in people who suddenly rise to the top and are given plenty of authority. They will be beyond control as they no longer need to subject themselves to the will of others."

Xiao Yuetan was shaken and looked to him. "From your tone, Shaolong seems to be unhappy with Master Lu!" he commented in a surprise tone.

Xiang Shaolong knew he had let the cat out of the bag. He hurriedly explained, "I am just causally mentioning from personal experience. It has nothing to do with Premier Lu."



After a quick moment of contemplation, Xiao Yuetan reassured in a soft voice, "Shaolong need not deceive me. Master Lu and you are two different breeds of human. I can totally trust you but can I totally trust Master Lu? Master Tu and I may be his confidante but we still have to watch our tongue around him. We are afraid to offend him after all."

Pausing, he added, "Moreover, he expanded his influence too quickly. When we first arrived at Xianyang, there were only seven hundred advisor-guests. Now, we have exceeded five thousand. How can we not incur the jealousy of the Qin population? This must be why we were assassinated in the pine forest."

Xiang Shaolong remembered those who lost their lives and kept quiet.

Xiao Yuetan knew that he has reminded Xiang Shaolong about the unhappy incident. Sighing, he advised, "After we have been through this life-and-death incident, I will be frank with you. With your character that values human relationships and love, you will soon be unable to tolerate Premier Lu's actions. Do you understand what I am trying to say?!"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in silence.

For Xiao Pan, he will be Lu Buwei's future enemy. This is his destiny!

The death of Zhao Qian and the maids has him fully convinced to help Xiao Pan unite the six states.

Only military might can eliminate military might.

Although the state of law is only seen two thousand years later, it will begin with him now.

“It is late!” he answered. “And we have to set off early tomorrow morning. Why don’t we retire to bed now?”

Xiao Yuetan invited, “You go ahead! I still want to stand here for a while longer.”

Xiang Shaolong smiled, “Then let’s use this wonderful night to chat till morning. I wish to understand Xianyang City’s position to a greater extent.”

Xiao Yuetan was delighted, “I will be glad to share with you my knowledge!”

The night passed like this.

The next morning, the fifty odd persons rode off towards Huang Lung Ling.

## CHAPTER 8

## An Earth-Shaking Conspiracy

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

AFTER journeying for more than twenty days, Huang Lung Ling was within sight. Situated on the Zhao-Qi border, the tall mountain protruded out of the flat plains surrounding it. The mountain peak is covered with thick layers of snow.

Everyone is feeling burdened emotionally and can hardly find any reason to be happy. They no longer enjoy the same energy as when they first left Xianyang City.

The only conversation going around was how to cover their tracks or counter the enemies' spying.

Halfway through the trip, they have shaken the pursuers off their trail.

Xiao Yuetan is surprisingly quiet and seems to have a lot on his mind.

After the night of chatting with Xiang Shaolong, he seems to be hiding something.

He may be oversensitive, but the closer he got to Hung Lung Ling, the more uneasy Xiang Shaolong feels.

Last night, he even had a dream. He dreamt about Zhao Qian and the four maids. They were dressed up beautifully and were smiling like blossoming flowers. They insisted on bringing him back to Xianyang. When he woke up, his face is wet with tears and his heart was akin to being sliced apart.

So although Teng Yi wanted to cover more distance, Xiang Shaolong insisted on camping on a flatland with their backs to mountain. He wanted more time to rest and think.

Before evening, Jing Jun, the Meng brothers and the hunters came back with prey and cooked them over a burning fire. To evade detection, they put out the fire at nightfall. In winter, sleeping at night without fire in the open wilderness is most unbearable.

With their goal in sight, everyone is excited and was chatting with joy.

Ji Yanran and Wu Tingfang were chatting secretly in their tents.

Xiao Yuetan got Li Si to chat with him at a nearby waterfall. They have a serious expression on their face.

Teng Yi and Xiang Shaolong were sitting among some scattered rocks near the campsite. Dazed, they watch the sun slowly set into the horizon.

Out of the blue, Li Si came over and invited them to join him.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi exchanged looks. Their heartbeat began to quicken at the same time. With Li Si, they approached Xiao Yuetan. Xiao Yuetan was staring blankly at the clear water falling down and his eyes are moist.

Li Si shook his head and sighed.

Even a patient man like Teng Yi could not hold back and questioned, "We are all close like family. Brother Xiao, please be straight forward about your thoughts."

Xiao Yuetan sighed deeply. Glancing at both men, he replied emotionally, "That night, I told Shaolong I love to let my mind wander. Regrettably, I did not find my thoughts as meaningless as before. Now, I am seriously asking myself 'What if' and the answer lies there."

He pointed strongly to Huang Lung Ling.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were trembling uncontrollably and their limbs turned ice-cold.

Li Si revealed, "Just now, Brother Xiao got me to analyze deeper regarding the red pine forest assassination. We

discovered many suspicious points and came to a frightening conclusion. I am afraid we have become the sacrificial lambs for Premier Lu.”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi looked at each other with their eyes full of surprise.

Xiao Yuetan started, “This trip should be extremely easy. The six states have always been fighting among themselves. With the recent Qi-Chu conspiracy against Zhao, it is harder for them to see eye-to-eye. This trip is actually unnecessary. In addition, Master Lu has been grooming his own clansmen and this will be a great opportunity to gain credit. However, this mission is given to Shaolong. Ai! There are many things I do not regard as important but now that we have suffered such a blow, I can find meaning in those things after deeper contemplation.”

Teng Yi’s face is completely white. In a deep voice, he commented, “I just could not understand how the enemy can attack us using the best opportunity and strategy. And it is just about the time when Lu Xiong and Qu Douqi had left with Yan in pursuit. Even if they are spying on us all the time, it is night time and snowing heavily. How can they be so sure we retreated into the forest and are letting our guard down? There must be a spy among us.”

Xiang Shaolong could feel his head becoming numb and his bones chilly. Taking a deep breath, he suppressed his emotions and asked, “How does it benefit Premier Lu? We are his men, and he has three hundred family warriors with

us. If Meng Wu and Meng Tian perished as well, Meng Ao will be devastated too.”

Xiao Yuetan lifted his sleeve and wiped away some tears. Sighing, he declared, “I have been with Master Lu for almost twenty years. To attain his goal, he is completely ruthless. It is the same in his business and power mongering.”

Pausing, he threw back a question, “If it is really done by Lord Yangquan, how will he benefit?”

This should be an easy and straightforward question. But under these circumstances, no one could give a ready answer.

King Zhuangxiang has always been thankful for Lord Yangquan’s intervention. When he promoted Lu Buwei to be the Right Premier, he promoted him to be the Left Premier. He also prevented Lu Buwei from giving trouble to Lord Yangquan.

If Xiang Shaolong and his entourage were annihilated, with rumours circulating that Lord Yangquan is scheming against them and among those dead were Lu Buwei’s own family warriors, no one will suspect that the entire setup is masterminded by Lu Buwei.

King Zhuangxiang and Zhu Ji adored Xiang Shaolong. If they were led to believe that Lord Yangquan killed Xiang Shaolong, Lord Yangquan will be in trouble. Even Lady Hua Yang will not be able to protect his brother.

With that, Lu Buwei will get rid of this thorn in his flesh and dominate the Qin politics.

Who else is closer to King Zhuangxiang and Zhu Ji other than himself?

Looking at the ashen face of Xiang Shaolong, Xiao Yuetan state in a deep voice, "Among all those that I have come across, there is none more scheming than Master Lu. If he succeeds, he can kill many birds with one stone."

Quivering, he continued, "First, he can be rid of you Xiang Shaolong. You have been too outstanding. The King and Queen hang onto your every word and even the Crown Prince respects you greatly. With the grand Wu Family Farm behind you, you will soon take some shine away from him. The people of Qin love heroes and military contributions. They need men like you who are intelligent and courageous. How can Lu Buwei just watch by the side?"

He no longer addressed Lu Buwei as Master Lu and used his full name instead. The three of them can sense the transformation in his attitude and understood the pain of betrayal by his master.

Li Si added, "He can use the death of the Meng children to strengthen his partnership with Meng Ao against Lord Yangquan's forces. He can also absorb the invincible elite Wu Family Warriors into his own residence, strengthening his forces. Sacrificing a few family warriors is nothing. Anyway, the three hundred family warriors came mainly from Master Tu and Master Xiao and are considered the



senior generation. With their deaths, the Lu clansmen will increase in power.”

Piak!

Teng Yi vehemently broke a young tree that was beside him into two.

Everyone was quiet and just look blankly at one another.

The pain in their hearts only seems to increase more and more.

They did their best for Lu Buwei but were treated in such a manner.

Xiao Yuetan summarized, “We will soon know if this is the case. If Lu Buwei betrayed us, the people waiting for us at Huang Lung Ling will not be Lu Xiong and Qu Douqi but those who attacked us at the red pine forest. If I am not wrong, Zhu Meng will lead the attack personally to prevent any information leakages. Once this is over, they just have to house these men outside Xianyang and everyone will be kept in the dark.”

Xiang Shaolong remembered the day when Lu Xiong refused to change the travelling path and his heart sank straight down.

Li Si warned, “Zhu Meng is extremely crafty. When we escaped, he disguised as Han soldiers to pursue us. We were deceived that it was Lord Yangquan conspiring with Han against us. What treachery!”

Unexpectedly, Teng Yi inquired in a peaceful manner, "Is Third Brother still going to Qi?"

Xiang Shaolong could not even force himself to smile. He slowly state, "I have only one interest now. I want to prove that it is really Lu Buwei betraying us. Following that, I will try to kill Zhu Meng and redeem some of the blood debt that Lu Buwei owes me."

The next evening, Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and Jing Jun returned from Huang Lung Ling with grave expressions. They gathered Li Si and Xiao Yuetan to the waterfall for a meeting.

Ji Yanran and Wu Tingfang knew about the matter and joined the discussion.

Before a word can be said, everyone knew the result.

Li Si asked in a deep voice, "How many of them are there?"

Teng Yi responded, "About a thousand. They were dressed as Qin soldiers and even put up Lu Xiong and Qu Douqi's flag emblem. Mister Xiao is right. They were led by Zhu Meng. He has been identified by Jing Jun."

Jing Jun nodded, "I have also identified some men from Lu Residence. Hng! They said they were my brothers and now they are waiting to kill me."

Wu Tingfang let out a cry and sought comfort in Ji Yanran's bosom. Ji Yanran's beautiful eyes shone as she questioned, "How are we going to make them pay for our suffering?"

Xiao Yuetan sighed, "I am afraid that Qu Douqi and the others are dead. This will naturally be blamed on Han so that the King will be convinced to attack Han in return. After so many years, I finally realise I am committing crimes for a crime lord."

Li Si reasoned, "You have to bear with it. Brother Xiao and I can leave anytime but Grand Tutor Xiang has the Wu Family burden on your shoulders and cannot leave just like that. Luckily, you have the support of the King and Queen. As long as you do not antagonize him, Lu Buwei cannot harm you for the time being."

Xiao Yuetan added, "On the surface, Shaolong must pretend that you believe the attack was masterminded by Lord Yangquan and Han. You must deceive everyone, including Lu Buwei. Keep a low profile and everyone should be fine. When the opportunity arises, relocate your family far away from the capital and see how this heartless man will eventually get his retribution."

Finishing, he could not help but tremble slightly.

Still embracing Wu Tingfang's in her bosom, Ji Yanran frowned, "How should we deal with Zhu Meng's forces now. If we left like this, we will raise suspicions. Meng Wu and Meng Tian are around. If they report to Meng Ao, Lu Buwei will know that we have discovered his ruse. He is expanding his influence every day. To topple Shaolong and Wu Family should not be too difficult."

Teng Yi suggested, "I am not worried about that yet. Let's lay our formation and prepare an escape route. We will use the normal communication to inform the enemies about our location. They will again attack us at night. We will lay waste to them before returning to Xianyang. Like what Shaolong said, we must take some sort of revenge on them."

Jing Jun retrieved a map from his sleeve. The layout of Huang Lung Ling was briefly sketched. On the map were three flags which represent the enemies' positions. Pointing to a ridge, he recommended, "There is a steep area here surrounded by slopes on three sides. It is part of a thick forest. The back is Huang Lung Ling's tributary which is four hours walk from Zhu Meng's position. We can lay our trap there. While the sun is strong these few days and the snow has melted from the trees, we can apply oil onto the trees. With a fire attack, we will give Zhu Meng the biggest surprise of his life."

Teng Yi pointed to behind the mountain and concluded, "We have done our investigations. With proper ropes, we can easily descend the mountain from the back. With the plains on the other side, we can leave quickly. Brother Xiao and Brother Li can wait for us there with Tingfang and the Meng brothers. You can keep an eye on the horse and the provisions."

Xiang Shaolong stood up declaring, "It is decided. We must now race against time. With our work in these few days, we will put up a good show for Zhu Meng."

The sun is setting into the horizon and the wilderness became desolate once more.

Using a bronze mirror to reflect sunlight into Zhu Meng's camp in succession, Xiang Shaolong paused for a while. He repeated it three times again before he kept the mirror.

This is the signal Xiang Shaolong and Qu Douqi agreed on before they split. When Lu Xiong and Qu Douqi saw this signal, they will send men to receive them but of course, it is not going to happen in this case.

The three sworn brothers led the eight elite Wu Family Warriors and the thirty eight hunters up the back mountain. Carrying as much arrows as they could, they shield themselves behind the protruding rocks and waited for the fish to enter their net.

Under the mountain were several tents that were partially hidden in the woods. If the enemy spied on them, they will not be suspicious.

As they wait for the sun to set from the centre of the sky, Xiang Shaolong could feel different surges of emotions.

He knew that he will one day clash with Lu Buwei; but he did not expect it to come so soon.

He recollected that King Zhuangxiang will die soon and Lu Buwei will be in power for ten years, his heart begins to palpitate. Such a long period of time, can he and the Wu Family hang on till the end?

It will all depend on Empress Zhu Ji the future Dowager. As long as Lu Buwei does not fight him openly, he has a way to handle his family warriors.

Back in Xianyang, he will secretly train soldiers and input his 21st century knowledge into making better weapons. He has never thought about such issues in the past. Now, to preserve his own life, he must utilise all his skills and knowledge.

From this moment, he will fight an underground war with Lu Buwei. When Xiao Pan is in power, it will be time for Lu Buwei to die. Historians have concluded that Lu Buwei committed suicide but Xiang Shaolong knew a man like him will never do such a silly thing. It may even be him who will finish Lu Buwei off.

He hated Zhao Mu but they have been enemies from the very beginning, unlike Lu Buwei this devious man who hides a knife beneath his smile, making him extremely bitter.

Besides him, Ji Yanran leaned over and whispered, "What are you thinking of?"

Xiang Shaolong felt guilty and sighed, "It has been hard on you!"

Ji Yanran softly replied, "This is nothing. For people like you, you will incur jealousy wherever you go. When I decided to follow you, Mister Zou has long predicted this but I did not even have the least bit of hesitation."

Filled with gratitude, Xiang Shaolong hugged her lightly.

This beautiful and intelligent woman gently commented, "When I heard that Empress Ji and you had many private conversations, I thought it is highly inappropriate. Lu Buwei has such a strong influence over King Zhuangxiang and Prince Zheng is due to her input. She keeps doting on you, giving Lu Buwei the motive to get rid of you. Only through this can he make Empress Ji whole-heartedly help him to eliminate Lord Yangquan and gain power. I have seen so many examples. Everyone behaves exactly the same."

Pausing, she added, "When I was a guest at Lu Residence, I can see that he is staring at me with a strange look in his eyes. I am very experienced with such a look. It is the look of jealousy."

The sky begins to darken and the crescent moon rose up to replace the sun, shining down on the snow plains. The snow capped peak of Huang Lung Ling is even more mesmerizing.

On the other side, Teng Yi was scrutinizing the dense forest and warned, "Here they come!"

The enemies began climbing the slopes on the three sides. They did not light their lamps and were very quiet. Only the sound of breaking branches can be heard, showing that these are well-trained men.

Xiang Shaolong and his men were in total silence and their arrows were notched in their bows.

With their high ground and rock shields, they are invincible. The only question is how many enemies they can kill!

Traps have been laid all over the campsite. The slopes and trees have all been applied with pine oil extracted from pine trees. When it starts to burn, it is no laughing matter.

After two hours, the sound of branches breaking has completely stopped. On the north wind is heard blowing.

Teng Yi coldly laughed, "Here we go!"

His words had barely left his lips when countless torches were lit at the same time and battle cries can be heard. Hundreds of men rushed towards the tents and arrows fell like rain into the tents. The air is heavy with a killing aura.

What happened next was men falling into traps and tragic shouts can be heard. The traps were set up by the hunters. Even wild beasts will lose their lives, not to mention humans.

With their torches falling down, the forest started to catch fire.

With the north wind blowing strongly, the fire burned ferociously.

The enemies on lower ground were in chaos and trampled on one another.

Xiang Shaolong gave the order and fire arrows were shot towards other areas of the dense forest.

The entire mountain top was engulfed in flames. Cries and shouting were heard everywhere.

Xiang Shaolong and his men did not hold back. Fuelled by revenge, they rained arrows on their attackers.



Under the bright flames, the enemies could see everything around them. Everything except an escape path. Although the hundreds of men in the traps were not burned, they could not escape the arrows and death.

When the entire mountain is burning like a giant fireball, Xiang Shaolong and his men could not take it anymore too. Using the ropes they prepared, they slipped away via the mountain back.

The pain in their hearts was relieved to a certain extent.

## CHAPTER 9

## Return To Xianyang

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

TWENTY DAYS has passed and they arrived back at Han once again.

Not only has Xiang Shaolong lost the enthusiasm to carry out his mission; he has lost all his valuables in the red pine forest and lost contact with the Qin army escort. To visit the various Kings of the six states empty handed will be a big joke.

After pitching their tents and getting ready for dinner, everyone is surprised to see that Xiao Yuetan has not turned

up. Li Si hastily rushed over and exclaimed, "Mister Xiao is sick!"

Everyone was surprised but it was not totally unexpected. For the past few days, Xiao Yuetan has been rather pale and quiet. Now, he has finally succumbed to his illness.

As everyone entered his tent, they were shocked.

Xiao Yuetan was gravely sick and he could hardly open his eyes. Forcing a smile, he groaned, "I don't think I am going to make it!"

Wu Tingfang and the Meng brothers who have always been close to him could not help but begin to cry softly.

Ji Yanran advised, "Mister Xiao should be well after another two days of rest!"

When she was about to take his pulse, he rejected, "I am well-versed in medication and know my health better than anyone. I wish to speak in private with Shaolong."

Everyone left the tent according to his wishes.

When Xiang Shaolong was left alone, Xiao Yuetan suddenly sat up and his eyes are brimming with energy. Although his face is still grey and deathly, it feels absolutely different.

As Xiang Shaolong was stunned by this dramatic transformation, he realised that he had put on make-up and faked his illness. Grasping his hand elatedly, he was lost for words.

Xiao Yuetan apologised, "I am so sorry to make Tingfang cry. But if I don't resort to this, I cannot deceive Meng Wu and Meng Tian."

Xiang Shaolong understood his meaning and softly asked, "Brother Xiao has decided not to return to Xianyang City."

Xiao Yuetan nodded, "I can no longer work for that traitor. He seeks my death to weaken Master Tu's forces and replace us with his clansmen. He dare not do so openly for fear of repercussions."

From under his pillow, he retrieved a sealed bamboo cylinder. Stuffing it into Xiang Shaolong's hands, he instructed, "My fake death can only be revealed to Li Si, Teng Yi and Master Tu. Shaolong, please help me hand this to Master Tu. He will understand after reading it. Get him to dismiss my servants and assistants. It is fortunate that I am childless and can leave without any considerations."

Xiang Shaolong remembered that he is childless too. Seems like being childless may not be so bad after all.

After hearing these chilling words from this witty man, Xiang Shaolong thought about the days when he first came to Handan City. Feeling melancholic, he sighed, "Where does Brother Xiao plan to go?"

Xiao Yuetan smiled, "The world is so big and there will surely be a place that can accommodate me. I still have some abilities that can earn me a living. It is better than living with a tiger under the same roof."

Xiang Shaolong nodded in silence.

Xiao Yuetan promised, "Once I am settled down, I will send word to Shaolong. You must remember to act as if everything is normal when you get back. Although Lord Yangquan's ambitions have been exaggerated by Lu Buwei, he is still a threat to you. If you can eliminate him, it will still be good for you. How many people will be implicated in this issue is beyond our control."

Pausing, he added, "If Zhu Meng is killed at Huang Lung Ling, the Lu clansmen will be weakened. As long as Lu Buwei is dependent on Master Tu, Master Tu will protect you. When you return to Xianyang, keep a low profile and do not visit Empress Ji or Crown Prince if possible. This is to preserve your life."

Xiang Shaolong thought about Xiao Pan and was troubled. How can he leave him alone? He did not wish to tell Xiao Pan the reason too as it may be too much for him to bear.

Xiao Yuetan forced his voice to go even deeper and advised, "After I slipped away tonight, burn the whole tent and announce that it is my death wish. Shaolong! Take care! Li Si may be a small fry in Lu Buwei's eyes and not get into trouble. However, this man is truly brilliant and will be of assistance to you in the future."

Xiang Shaolong imagined the grandeur of Premier Li Si managing the Qin court in future and envisioned Qin engaging the six states. He visualized thousands of soldiers and horses in a fierce battle.

His heart is bursting with pride.

Xiang Shaolong! You must not sink into depression or you will not witness such a grand scene.

In a gloomy state, Xiang Shaolong returned to Xianyang City. Lu Buwei has received word and is waiting for them outside the city.

Everyone wish they could rip him into pieces there and then. But he is escorted by hundreds of elite bodyguards. Everyone is alert and fit. It appears that he has no idea about what has happened and is still taking prevention against them.

Meng Ao came along as well. Everyone has a look of defeat on their faces and there was no sign of Qu Douqi, Lu Xiong, Xiao Yuetan, the one thousand Qin army and the three hundred Lu Family Warriors.

Meng Ao was utterly shocked unlike Lu Buwei who is faking it. Meng Wu and Meng Tian made it back home after much difficulty. After all, they were still young. Catching sight of their father, they leapt down their horses and ran straight into his arms. Crying and telling the entire story, they saved Xiang Shaolong from a lengthy explanation.

Talking about Huang Lung Ling, Lu Buwei sighed with relief and thought that his scheme has not been exposed.

When he heard about Xiao Yuetan's death, Lu Buwei beat his chest and stomped on the ground wailing, "I will seek justice for Yuetan."

Turning to Xiang Shaolong, he reassured, "Shaolong! This is not your fault. Let's enter the palace now and speak to Your Majesty."

In the past, Xiang Shaolong will be very thankful but it is a different matter now.

As everyone went on their way, Meng Ao expressed his deepest gratitude to Xiang Shaolong and led his two sons back home.

Teng Yi, Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang and the rest returned to Wu residence.

Li Si and some bodyguards returned to Lu Residence while Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong rode towards the palace.

Among the galloping sounds, Xiang Shaolong wanted to find some words to comfort Lu Buwei. However, his heart is filled with revenge and he could not find the right words to say.

Lu Buwei thought that he is worried about King Zhuangxiang censure. He pretended to assure him, "It is all my fault. I did not anticipate Yan's Xu Yiluan to ambush us and cause Shaolong to suffer a setback. I will choose a few beauties from my residence to replace the wife and maids that perished. Forget about the past."

Still vengeful, Xiang Shaolong insisted, "Premier Lu, please don't bother. Hey! How is the campaign against Eastern Zhou?"

Lu Buwei was immediately exhilarated and replied in a pleased manner, "A measly Zhou is not worth a mention.

Once conquered, His Majesty combined Eastern Zhou and Western Zhou into three provinces as I recommended. I am promoted to be Marquis Wenxing and am responsible for these provinces, the ten thousand households residing there as well as the three rivers – River He, River Luo and River Yi.”

Pausing, he added happily, “We must not let Lord Yangquan off. His conspiracy with Han is unforgivable. Without Eastern Zhou hindering our path, I will recommend His Majesty to attack Han. While the six states are busy with their own affairs, we will overrun Han and then set our sights on Zhao and Wei.”

Xiang Shaolong was filled with dread. Xiao Yuetan is right after all. This man is vicious and scheming. Not many people under the sky are his match.

Speaking until here, the majestic palace gates appear before their eyes.

Xiang Shaolong sighed. King Zhuangxiang had trusted him so much and yet he must deceive him. Why is life full of such helpless incidents?

King Zhuangxiang received them in the Imperial Study. After listening to his story, his face changed colour and he seems infuriated. For a while, he remained in silence.

Seated on his right with Xiao Pan, Zhu Ji wailed, “Lord Yangquan is so daring to cause the death of Shaolong’s wife. We even lost soldiers and generals. Your Majesty must seek justice.”



Fire was sprouting out of Xiao Pan's eyes as he clenched his fist. Zhao Qian has been close to him like a sister. Lu Buwei put on an act and sighed, "I have always obeyed Your Majesty and made peace with Left Premier. Who knew that he is such a person! Even if he is Your Majesty's benefactor, Your Majesty has been kind to him as well. How dare he repay kindness with evil intentions! Ai! I do not know what to say."

Xiang Shaolong lowered his head to prevent Lu Buwei from seeing his scornful expression.

After a moment of contemplation, King Zhuangxiang faced Xiang Shaolong and promised, "On this trip, the household of every casualty shall receive ten taels of gold. Ai! You cannot bring back the dead and Shaolong must take it easy. First, Ting Fangshi died of illness and now Princess Qian is murdered. I can feel your pain. If Shaolong has any requests, feel free to speak your mind. I will do my best to grant your wish."

Zhu Ji and Lu Buwei hurriedly winked at him to get Zhuangxiang to seek justice for him.

Xiang Shaolong pretended not to see the winks. Kneeling down, he kowtowed, "I have no wishes other than to move into seclusion and mourned for my dead wife."

King Zhuangxiang, Zhu Ji, Lu Buwei and Xiao Pan were in shock. Glancing at each other, they were dumbfounded.

Zhu Ji's expression is different and she frowned, thinking hard for the real reason.

She knows that Xiang Shaolong is fair to those who have helped him and those who have harmed him. Why is he is not taking action against Lord Yangquan?

Lu Buwei did not know that his scheme is exposed. Witnessing his defeated expression, he was secretly delighted.

Xiao Pan was in a state of panic. He was afraid that Grand Tutor is ignoring him for good. Luckily, he knows that Xiang Shaolong is deeply in love with Zhao Qian. Even if he is unhappy, he forgives him

King Zhuangxiang thought that Xiang Shaolong did not want to put him in a difficult position and even put his personal revenge aside. He was touched and reassured, "Shaolong must take a good rest now. I will not let this matter rest like this. I will see Empress Dowager later and seek her opinion."

Zhu Ji advised, "Your Majesty must not do so. Empress Dowager may not be on good terms with Lord Yangquan but they are siblings after all. If he receives word and create internal strife, the commoners will suffer."

Lu Buwei left his seat and kowtowed, "We must look at the big picture. Please give the order. I will lead the army and annihilate the traitors to display the might of Your Majesty."

King Zhuangxiang stared at Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong kneeling before him. Gritting his teeth, he committed, "Fine! Premier shall see to this matter. You must spare Left Premier's life though. I will decide what to do with him after I speak to Empress Dowager."

Lu Buwei could hardly hold back his glee and agreed.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, "Great! I will let you enjoy your short-lived victory. One day, I, the man from the future 21st Century, will kill you personally."

Back in the Wu residence, everyone was grieved and depressed.

Tao Fang received him at the main door. Pulling him to the garden, he was panting heavily and could not utter a single word.

Xiang Shaolong felt that something was amiss. Quivering, he asked, "What is it?"

Tao Fang shook his head and replied, "A lot has happened in Zhao and Wei. I am afraid Lady Ya will not be coming."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken, "She is dead?"

Tao Fang bitterly laughed, "She is not dead but has reignited her passion with Prince Xinling. This kind of wanton woman; you had better forget about her."

Xiang Shaolong was instead relieved. As long as it is her own wish, he will not hold it against her. Since he knew her, she has been a loose and passionate woman. Moreover, Prince Xinling is a very eligible bachelor. The only thing he could not understand was that they could still get together despite all the issues that stand between them.

Tao Fang's voice sounded in his ear once again, "Empress Jing has become the Empress Dowager and wield absolute

power in Zhao. She sent an envoy to the King of Wei and asked for the head of Zhao Ya. It is fortunate that Lord Longyang helped Zhao Ya escape and seek refuge in Prince Xinling's residence. Receiving his protection, Zhao Ya repaid his gratitude by becoming his woman and will be based there for the time being. She has sent someone to inform you that you are the only man she has ever loved and hope that you will forgive her."

Xiang Shaolong thought that after all the trials and tribulations; Lord Longyang is the most trustworthy. He kept his promise to protect Zhao Ya even though Dong Horse Fanatic has 'died'. In a serious tone, he questioned, "What about Zhao Zhi?"

Tao Fang replied, "Relax! She is back and waiting for you in the residence."

Xiang Shaolong heaved a sigh of relief, "I thought it was something more serious. Master Tao, your solemn expression gave me a big fright. Ai! Why is your face still as pale?"

Tao Fang answered, "When Cui Lu and Cui Tong heard about Third Princess's death, they secretly hanged themselves. When we found them, they had just lost their breaths and their body is still warm."

These words struck him like a bolt from the sky. Xiang Shaolong was shaking non-stop and his tears flowed like two streams of water. He almost could not bear this cruel reality.

In a side room of the inner hall, with a wooden expression Xiang Shaolong gave Xiao Yuetan's letter to Master Tu who is there to pay his last respects to Zhao Qian and the maids.

Master Tu did not say a word. Opening the sealed container, he retrieved the scroll of paper within and read it in silence. Amazingly, there was no change in his expression.

Once finished, he set fire and burned the letter to ashes. He then plainly said, "For the past two decades, I have never regarded Xiao Yuetan as my subordinate. In fact, we were closer than brothers. We respected each other very much though we never openly voice it. He is the only man I will trust with my life. Even in such a time, he has left me a note, showing that I have not judged this good brother wrongly."

Xiang Shaolong sighed but did not say anything in return.

Master Tu casually shrugged his shoulders and leisurely mentioned, "When the birds are gone, you keep your bow. This is a true saying since ancient times. It is easy to share woe but hard to share wealth. The disadvantage of old leaders like us is we know too much about Master Lu, especially the secret relationship between him and Zhu Ji. Before I read this letter, I have interrogated everything from Li Si so I am able to maintain my composure."

Xiang Shaolong finally understood how Master Tu can remain so emotionless.

Master Tu coldly state, "Lu Buwei may be powerful but I am not one to be trifled with either. Zhu Meng has yet to return and must have died. Lu Xiong has just come back though.

You must be careful with Meng Ao. If he knows the truth, given his straightforward character, he will confront and be killed by Lu Buwei. Now that Lord Yangquan has been imprisoned with another ten thousand people who are close to him. Over half of the Qin military leaders have thrown in their lot with Lu Buwei. If it is an open battle, we will not last an hour against him.”

Xiang Shaolong nodded, “What plans does Brother Tu have?”

The corner of Master Tu’s mouth curled up in a cold smile and replied in a low voice, “Like you, I am waiting for a good opportunity.”

Laughing, he left after having expressed the discomfort in his chest.

Xiang Shaolong continued to sit there in a daze. Until Wu Yingyuan sat down beside him did he snap back to reality.

Wu Yingyuan sighed, “Premier Lu got me to speak to you. He is in need of men and General Meng Ao is leaving to attack Han. Will Shaolong be his assistant general?”

Xiang Shaolong sincerely asked, “Does Father-in-law trust me?”

Wu Yingyuan was taken aback and nodded, “Of course! I trust you more than my own son.”

Xiang Shaolong whispered, “In everything I do, the Wu family safety is my top most concern, including this moving

into seclusion. One day, Father-in-law will understand why I did this. For now, please do not ask me for the reason.”

Wu Yingyuan was shaken. His face losing colour, he inquired, “What are you hiding from me?”

With giant tears flowing down his face, he slowly said, “Doesn’t Father-in-law wish to build a magnificent cenotaph for Grandfather Wu? If I, Xiang Shaolong, am still alive ten years later, I will fulfil your wish.”

Wu Yingyuan was dumbfounded for a while. Letting out a long sigh, he nodded, “I understand! Regardless of what may happen, we will leave Xianyang City tomorrow. Our father and son relationship will always remain the same.”

## CHAPTER 10

## Highly Trusted

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

IF not for Ting Fangshi's sickness and eventual death, he will not be motivated to bring Wu Tingfang and Zhao Qian with him on his mission. Zhao Qian will be able to stay alive and so will Chunying and her fellow maids. In addition, Cui Tong and Cui Lu will not hang themselves to accompany Zhao Qian in death.

When he was in such extreme danger in Daliang, with some luck, he still managed to protect this pretty Third Princess of Zhao. But on the river beside the red pine forest, she died a



horrible death. Ultimately, he wasn't sharp enough and was tricked by Lu Buwei.

He will not let Lu Buwei trick him again, for he will not be able to take it anymore.

Seven young and energetic ladies who are undergoing the prime of their lives were gone just like that, as if it was a wet dream.

He can never forget the stark difference between their usual enchanting appearances to the frightening and ugly look of their corpses.

After six months on the farms, his turbulent emotions has calmed down to a huge extent. He did not give a hoot to politics but focused all his energy on training his secret army. At the end, he produced an elite fighting unit that was five thousand strong. These men will help him to support Xiao Pan ascend the throne and counter Lu Buwei's private army.

Three thousand of these warriors came from the Wu Family Warriors. The rest of them come from Pu Bu's men, Jing village hunters, and also from the Wu estates situated all over the six states.

They formed five armies with one thousand soldiers in each army. They are led by Wu Zhuo, Teng Yi, Jing Jun, Wu Guo and Pu Bu. They masquerade as farmers during the day and did their training at night. Because of this, they excelled in night missions.

The training was designed by Teng Yi and himself. Needless to say, most of the training content came from the 21st century that was modified to suit their current requirements.

To get something done, you need the right tools.

With Ji Yanran's blacksmiths from Yue coupled with Xiang Shaolong knowledge of alloys from the 21st century, they produced the best weapons known during those times.

The average swords used are three to four feet long. Any swords longer than that will break easily. However, they managed to produce a thin sword that was five feet long. Based on this advantage alone, they have increased their fighting prowess.

Wu Yingyuan sent men all over the country and cultivated a new breed of warhorses. Regardless of endurance or speed, they surpassed the current standards by a huge margin.

Xiao Yuetan is right. With the Wu family wealth and expertise backing Xiang Shaolong, he will be a force to reckon with.

Xiang Shaolong has been trained in the art of espionage and intelligence gathering. He understood the need for spies and trained another hundred men in this field. Once they completed their training, Tao Fang was placed in charge of them.

After six months of hard work, they have succeeded in forming a self sufficient secret military organization.

On several occasions, Lu Buwei will send someone to check on them. With Master Tu's secret protection, they are unable to discover anything new.

The days passed peacefully on the surface but it is an intensive competition in hiding.

On this day, Tao Fang visited them from Xianyang City. He could not find Xiang Shaolong in the Hidden Dragon Abode. Escorted by Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang and Zhao Zhi, he made his way to the Moon Prayer Peak military training ground to report the latest news to Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong and Tao Fang proceeded to the army camps. Sitting down on some rocks in the middle of an open area, they begin to chat.

Tao Fang started, "Meng Ao has been victorious in attacking Zhao, conquering Chen Nie and Xinyang. Gaining the upper hand, he continued to set his sights on Yuci and Langmeng. The people of the six states are in panic and it was rumoured that King Anli and Prince Xinling have put aside their differences. Prince Xinling will personally visit the six states and get the support of everyone to counter the threat of Qin."

His face losing colour, Xiang Shaolong commented, "Zhao Ya is in danger!"

Tao Fang was slightly stunned and replied with displeasure, "Such a loose woman; Shaolong should not be bothered with her."

He understood where Shaolong was coming from. If Prince Xinling approached Zhao, it will be negotiating with Empress Dowager Jing rather than the young king. With the deep grudges between Zhao Ya and Empress Dowager Jing, Zhao Ya's death will be the condition for them to work together.

After thinking for a moment, Xiang Shaolong inquired in a deep voice, "Are Zhao and Yan still fighting?"

Tao Fang answered, "Yan is fighting a losing battle. After Lian Po has eliminated Yan's famed general Li Fu, Yan has called for a truce but will have to offer concessions to Zhao. The first goal of Prince Xinling is to get them to stop fighting."

His expression turning ugly, Xiang Shaolong questioned, "How long has it been since Prince Xinling went on this mission?"

Tao Fang guessed that he still has feelings for Zhao Ya. He sighed, "Till today, it would have been about five months. If Prince Xinling and Han Jing has a secret agreement to take Zhao Ya's life, there is nothing we can do."

Xiang Shaolong was flustered.

Tao Fang reminded, "We can hardly protect ourselves now. Lu Buwei's influence is growing day by day. The advisor-guests in his residence have exceeded eight thousand and he has built another Premier residence that is three times bigger than the old one. He has purposely left the Left Premier post empty so that he may dominate Qin politics. With his military successes, everyone in Xianyang City is dancing to his tune."

Xiang Shaolong put aside Zhao Ya's issue and enquired, "Master Tao has come all the way here. Are there any more updates?"

Tao Fang's expression grew more serious and added, "There is a strange matter indeed. His Majesty sent an attendant from the inner palace to look for me. He wants to summon you into the palace for a conference. That is the reason I came all the way here to inform you. The attendant who is named Teng Sheng is very secretive and I am sure there is more than meets the eye."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned by this development when Wu Tingfang's voice jingled, "Hubby! Come and judge for us who is a better mountaineer, Zhi Zhi or me?"

Xiang Shaolong groaned to himself. His peaceful lifestyle is about to come to an end.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi led eighteen of their men and travelled non-stop for one day and night, rushing back to Xianyang City. The moment they entered the city, they went straight into the palace for the royal audience.

These eighteen men has been named the Eighteen Guardians by Teng Yi. They include Wu Yanzhu and Wu Shu who had accompanied him to red pine forest. Altogether, there were ten warriors from the Wu Family, six hunters from Jing Village, one man from Pu Bu's brothers and one man from Ji Yanran's family warriors.

Under the strictest training, the Eighteen Guardians have shown amazing resilience to be the best among the five

thousand. As Xiang Shaolong's personal escorts, they are the best among the best and the cream among the cream.

Since the red pine forest incident, everyone went through a lot of mental suffering and realise the value of self-preservation. With strong forces, they can still escape any confrontation even if they cannot win.

King Zhuangxiang had given orders in advance. When the palace guards saw Xiang Shaolong coming, they held Teng Yi and the Guardians in the outer palace and brought Xiang Shaolong into the Imperial Study to meet King Zhuangxiang.

King Zhuangxiang looks as majestic as ever. Only his brows were slightly creased, betraying some signs of tiredness.

Dismissing his men, King Zhuangxiang and Xiang Shaolong were seated in order of authority. The door was closed for privacy.

This King of the most powerful state smiled broadly, "Six months has passed so fast. Two days ago, I had a strange inspiration. Wouldn't it be great if Shaolong can be part of my court? Witnessing your energetic form, I am happy that you have let go of the past!"

Xiang Shaolong was touched. This prestigious man has not been corrupted by the vast amount of power he wields.

He was feeling hurt at the same time, remembering that he does not have many more days to live. At the same time, he is puzzled. King Zhuangxiang does not resemble someone whose life is about to end very soon.

Confused by his thoughts, he was overwhelmed with emotions and could not reply King Zhuangxiang for the time being.

King Zhuangxiang nodded, "Shaolong is a man who values love and relationships. I can see it from your eyes. Are you aware that Lord Yangquan has passed away three days ago? Your wife's death has finally been avenged."

Xiang Shaolong was astonished, "Your Majesty sentenced him to death?"

King Zhuangxiang shook his head, "It was Buwei. He thought that I am still in the dark. After putting Lord Yangquan in house arrest, he provided him with beauties and strong liquor. This man has always been an alcoholic and pervert. I have once censured him for over-indulging in women and wine. Now that he is fully immersed in these sins for the past six months, his body finally broke down and he died! I guess it is better this way; only his death can redeem his sins."

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. He may not have any appreciation for Lord Yangquan but ultimately, he is just a loser in the power struggle. Compared to Lu Buwei, he is far too inferior.

King Zhuangxiang may not have many confidantes. In a talkative mood, he revealed, "When I was imprisoned in Handan City, I thought that my troubles will be over when I am back in Xianyang City. I am mistaken. From being the Crown Prince till the King, I am besotted with endless troubles. If I heed Premier Lu's advice to unite the world,

that kind of burden will be unbearable. It is already very tough to govern Qin alone.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly that these burdens will be Xiao Pan’s, not yours. Remembering the constructions of Qin, he suggested, “There are ways to govern a village and there are ways to govern a country. You have to combine military strength and politics. There is internal military and external military. For external military, you can connect all the walls of various states and prevent the Xiong Nu invasion. For internal military, you can disarm the military of the six states. Then apply strict regulations and the world will be peaceful.”

These are not his points of views but what truly happened in history.

King Zhuangxiang’s eyes lit up and excitedly questioned, “What about politics?”

Like dictation, Xiang Shaolong rattled from memory, “To unite the world, you have to utilise the appropriate strategies. First, you must abolish the feudal system and split the country into provinces. They will report directly to Xianyang. You must create a system to standardise weights and measurement, currency, writings, languages and roads. Then you build bridges across all the rivers and stimulate the traffic and economy within the country. Peace will always come after chaos. Your Majesty need not burden yourself too much.”



King Zhuangxiang could not stop gaping, “Shaolong’s casual words are full of foresight. You must be my new Left Premier.”

Xiang Shaolong was blown away. “What?” he stammered.

Pleased, King Zhuangxiang state, “Lord Yangquan has been the Left Premier of Qin. Now that he is gone, someone else must fill this vacancy. I have been troubled by this issue and I am worried about your lack of experience in politics. But having heard what you just mentioned, I no longer have any doubts in my mind.”

Xiang Shaolong was covered with sweat. He knows nothing about politics and just quoted what he read from history books to lighten King Zhuangxiang’s burden. Who can imagine that it will create such a “horrible” result? He frantically knelt down and kowtowed, “This cannot be. Will Your Majesty please retract your order!”

King Zhuangxiang was annoyed, “Shaolong is unwilling to help me govern my country?”

Xiang Shaolong was cursing inside. “Has Your Majesty spoken to Premier Lu?” he asked.

King Zhuangxiang replied, “Great General Meng has just conquered thirty-seven cities belonging to Zhao. Premier Lu has left yesterday to design a new province. Now, we command Sanchuan and Taiyuan two strategic locations and broke through Sanjin. It will not be long before we unite the world. Lu Buwei’s responsibilities are increasing day by day

and Shaolong is one of the men he regards highly. With you assisting him, he need not run about like a mad man.”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, If I became the Left Premier, I will probably report to Hell before you. Trying to shun this responsibility, he was inspired and explained, “If I am promoted to Left Premier, it will bring disadvantages to Premier Lu.”

King Zhuangxiang was taken aback and ordered, “Shaolong, return to your seat and explain yourself.”

Back in his seat, Xiang Shaolong reported, “After all, I am Premier Lu’s follower and it is he who brought me to Xianyang City. If I take up this promotion, there will be rumours that Premier Lu puts his own men in key positions and has ill intentions. Moreover, I am not originally from Qin and has no political experience. The people will not submit to me.”

King Zhuangxiang frowned, “But I do not see anyone who is more suitable than you.”

Xiang Shaolong blurted the first name that came to his mind, “General Xu Xian is a talented man as well. Why don’t Your Majesty consider him?”

Although he had only met Xu Xian once, he was impressed that Xu Xian disregarded Lu Buwei’s invitation and mentioned his name.

King Zhuangxiang was moved. Nodding, he agreed, "Your suggestion is worth considering. Are you really uninterested?"

Xiang Shaolong quickly brought up all the disadvantages he could think of, even those that are not even real. At the same time, he highlighted the advantages of Xu Xian as the Left Premier. When King Zhuangxiang finally relented, he was extremely relieved and added, "Shaolong has a small suggestion."

King Zhuangxiang accepted, "Shaolong, please speak your mind."

Xiang Shaolong requested, "There is an advisor-guest named Li Si in Premier Lu's residence. He accompanied me on my last mission and has displayed his extensive knowledge and talent. Can Your Majesty give him an official post?"

King Zhuangxiang smiled, "This is a small matter. I will give him a post immediately. Shaolong, you are always putting others before yourself. You are a rare breed."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly elated. He added, "Can this position be related to the Crown Prince? With this man around the Crown Prince, the Crown Prince will definitely benefit."

King Zhuangxiang did not suspect that this is the most powerful move against Lu Buwei. Pleased, he consented, "Let him be a study attendant and accompany Prince Zheng in his studies. Oh! Please visit Empress Ji and Prince Zheng! They missed you a lot."

Xiang Shaolong thanked the gods whom he has been hating for the past six months and excused himself.

Stepping out of the Imperial Study, two palace maids came up to him and brought him to visit Zhu Ji.

Xiang Shaolong knew that visiting her is a bad idea but could not find a reason to reject her invitation.

In a luxuriously decorated room in the inner palace, Xiang Shaolong was looking out of the window and admiring the autumn colours. Under the escorts of four palace maids, Zhu Ji came in and sat opposite him. Batting her curvy eye lashes and scrutinising him with her crystal clear eyes, she gleefully commented, "Shaolong is looking great and I am happy for you."

After the four palace maids have retreated to one corner, Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "The dead have died. Survivors like us can only live on strongly."

Zhu Ji quietly advised, "Shaolong, you must be strong. I am afraid whenever you speak like this."

Xiang Shaolong sighed but did not reply her.

Zhu Ji was lost for words.

Finally, Xiang Shaolong spoke up. "Is Empress Ji happy?" he asked.

Pleased, Zhu Ji answered, "Without Lord Yangquan and his cronies distorting the truth and Buwei's success coupled with Prince Zheng growing up to be a fine young man, there

is nothing more I can ask for. If Shaolong can tutor Prince Zheng everyday like before, I will have no more regrets in life.”

Xiang Shaolong was moved by her words. But remembering King Zhuangxiang who is about to die soon and the ambitious Lu Buwei, he was undecided. “Can I think it over?” he pleaded.

Zhu Ji joyfully cooed, “I will not force you. I just hope that you will regain your former self. With you assisting Prince Zheng, the world will belong to him.”

Xiang Shaolong is simply afraid to continue the conversation with this charming and intelligent beauty. Taking the chance, he bade farewell.

Zhu Ji did not make it difficult for him and sent him to the door. In a low voice, she insisted, “Take another six months to think it over! When time is up, you must not reject His Majesty’s promotion.”

From these words, Xiang Shaolong realised that it was Zhu Ji who advised King Zhuangxiang to promote him to be the new Left Premier.

After all, he is Zhu Ji’s confidante and it will benefit Zhu Ji to have him in this important position.

Leaving her palace, Zhu Ji got an attendant to bring him to Xiao Pan.

To be honest, Xiang Shaolong missed this future Qin Shihuang too. Despite knowing that he is coincidentally attending Qin Qing's lesson, he insisted on waiting for him.

He is slightly afraid of Qin Qing. After suffering the blow from Zhao Qian's and the maid's deaths, he is not interested in women anymore. This is unlike when he first came to this time frame and was laying every beauty he came across.

In the past, he will take every opportunity to seduce this virtuous Qin widow and get her onto his bed.

Now, if he can spend the rest of his days in peace with Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang, Zhao Zhi and the Tian sisters, it will be more than what he can ask for.

## CHAPTER 11

## Meeting Qin Qing Again

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

RECALLING the day when Xiao Pan came out in the middle of Qin Qing's lesson to look for him, causing Qin Qing to scold him as well, Xiang Shaolong told the attendant, "I will wait for Prince Zheng in the garden."

The attendant suggested, "Grand Tutor Xiang can wait outside the room. The lesson is about to end."

Xiang Shaolong nodded in agreement and sat down on a bench at the side. Out of a sudden, he felt completely

relaxed. Xianyang City without Lu Buwei is like a clear stream without man-eating crocodiles.

Out of all the people he came across in these ancient times, the talented and outstanding leaders include Prince Xinling, Tian Dan and Lu Buwei. However, in terms of scheming, Lu Buwei is the best.

This businessman single-handedly helped Zhuangxiang ascend the throne, got himself promoted to be Premier and annihilated his political enemies. He is truly formidable.

Xiang Shaolong knew that he himself is not his match but even so, Lu Buwei will never guess that his 'son' Xiao Pan is actually a replacement Xiang Shaolong conjured up.

When Xiao Pan ascend the throne, he will automatically win.

The question is - can he last until then?

Qin Qing's sweet voice rang out like music, "Grand Tutor Xiang! This is the first time we have met this year!"

Xiang Shaolong snapped out of his daydreaming and paid his respects.

This slender and charming widow returned his greetings. Her skin is glowing white and staring at her is a treat for his eyes.

Ji Yanran's beauty is enchanting but Qin Qing is a different flavour altogether. With her endless flow of appeal, her classy and well-proportioned figure, any man will be swept off his feet.



Qin Qing caught Xiang Shaolong staring at herself in a daze. Her face turning red, she shyly excused, "Grand Tutor Xiang, Prince Zheng is waiting for you inside. I take my leave first."

After a curtsy, she sashayed away.

Xiang Shaolong kicked himself for losing control and entered Xiao Pan's room.

The kid has grown even taller and his features are even sharper than before. While he may not be handsome, he possesses thick eyebrows, sharp eyes and an imposing tall nose. With firm lips, he gives the impression of strong determination. Adding to his rectangular shaped face and chiselled jaws, he resembles the conqueror who will one day rule the world.

Even when Xiang Shaolong entered the room, he was pretending to be engrossed in his books and dare not act loosely like before.

Somehow, Xiang Shaolong was feeling lost as if there is a much bigger gap between him and Xiao Pan.

After Xiang Shaolong paid his respects, Xiao Pan returned the greetings. At the same time, he gestured his two attendants to leave the room.

When both of them are seated, Xiao Pan's eyes shone with warmth. In a low voice, he commented, "Grand Tutor has lost weight!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "How is Crown Prince doing?"

Xiao Pan nodded, "Everything is great! Hng! Lord Yangquan caused the death of Princess Qian and got his retribution. The people of Han will not have many days of happiness left."

Xiang Shaolong was feeling cold upon hearing his words. They do not seem to come from a fifteen year old.

Xiao Pan curiously asked, "Why does Grand Tutor seem to have a lot on his mind?"

At this time, Xiang Shaolong wished to hear him call himself 'Master', but remembering that he has forbid him from doing so in the first place, he gave up the idea. Forcing a smile, he replied, "There are many things that you will understand in the future."

Xiao Pan was stunned and thought hard in silence.

Xiang Shaolong was beginning to believe that this future Emperor is going to be more than meets the eye. He instructed, "You are still young and must focus on your studies and gain more knowledge. Hei! Did you disturb the palace girls like in the past?"

Xiao Pan replied in a soft voice, "I am not interested in that ridiculous stuff anymore. Now, my only unhappiness comes from Grand Tutor being unable to teach me every day. Even Wang Ben misses you!"

At the last sentence, child-like innocence can be seen from Xiao Pan.

Xiang Shaolong recalled the day when he was practising martial arts with them. Then, Zhao Qian and the maids are still living happily together. Filled with agony, he simply state, "I will take care of myself. Let me rest for six more months! All right?"

Xiao Pan's eyes suddenly turned red. Lowering his head, he whispered, "I dreamt of Mum last night!"

Xiang Shaolong naturally knew that he is referring to Zhao Ni and his mood got worse. Patting him on the shoulder, he assured, "Don't think too much. When you become a good King in the future, your mother's spirit will be comforted."

Xiao Pan nodded, "Not only must I be a good King, I must unite the world. Premier Lu often taught me this principle."

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and smiled bitterly, "Fine! We will unite the world. I have arranged a talented man to tutor you. This man is named Li Si. As long as you make good use of him, you will be a great Emperor whose name will be remembered for centuries."

Xiao Pan repeated Li Si's name a few times before happily exclaiming, "Will Grand Tutor assist me in fighting the six states in the future? Ai! Thinking about war, I would love to be an adult right now and don my battle armour."

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "We shall see! I must return to the farms. You need not send me off or you may arouse suspicions."

The palace is filled with Lu Buwei's spies and it is better to be safe than sorry.

Xiao Pan grasped tightly onto his hand before releasing his grip. Nodding in agreement, his expression was filled with determination and strength.

Xiang Shaolong's heart skipped a beat. Ai! It is truly Qin Shihuang!

Stepping outside the room, two palace maids approached him greeting, "Empress Dowager wishes to meet Grand Tutor Xiang."

Xiang Shaolong was not in favour of meeting Lady Hua Yang now. He is even afraid that she may bring up Lord Yangquan's issue. He dare not turn down her invitation and was cursing at Qin Qing. If not for her, Empress Dowager will not know that he is in the palace.

Just like the last time, Empress Dowager Lady Hua Yang was accompanied by Qin Qing and they were waiting for him in her own palace. After paying his respects, Xiang Shaolong sat down. Lady Hua Yang started, "It is a nice coincidence that Grand Tutor Xiang is back. Another two days later and I will not be able to see you."

Whether it is due to Lord Yangquan, her younger brother's death or not, Lady Hua Yang seemed to have aged a few years since they last met. She still retain her comforting expression with some small signs of tiredness. Overall, she does not look happy.

Xiang Shaolong was surprised, "Where is Empress Dowager going?"

He recollected she had given him a valuable headdress to be given to her Chu relative. Not only has he failed to do so, he even lost it in the red pine forest. In addition, he did not even apologise to her for his failure. Guilt-ridden, he was grateful that she still appreciates him.

Lady Hua Yang's eyes had a dreamy look as she softly replied, "The day after tomorrow, I will leave for the Summer Palace at Bashu. I was told that the land is flat and fertile. Even if you scatter some seeds, they will grow into trees without further care. I am old and do not wish to witness all these infighting. I want to find a nice place and spend the rest of my life in peace."

Qin Qing interrupted, "Bashu has nice hills and streams, producing excellent livestock. The late king appointed Li Bin to govern the province. Li Bin has irrigated the place well and transformed wasteland into fertile farms. Empress Dowager will love the place."

Lady Hua Yang adoringly gazed at Qin Qing and softly asked, "So why are you not going with me? What is left in Xianyang City that is worth your time? I am still worried about you."

Qin Qing's pretty eyes turned to Xiang Shaolong and her face reddened immediately. Lowering her head, she replied in a low voice, "I am responsible to tutoring Prince Zheng and dared not leave."

Xiang Shaolong can sense the deep friendship between these two women. At the same time, he is secretly alarmed. He could not imagine the icy-cold Qin Qing has crossed her own line and fell in love with himself. Thinking deeper, he was sure that he is mistaken and it is his own wishful thinking.

Ai! Love is the world's greatest burden and he does not have the courage to engage in a new relationship. Like his fleeting romance with Shan Rou, short but beautiful. A great experience is more than enough.

With each in their own thoughts, the room became very quiet.

Lady Hua Yang suddenly mentioned, "Shaolong, take care of Qing'er on my behalf. She is stubborn and headstrong, causing inconveniences to other people."

Qin Qing protested, "Empress Dowager! I can take care of myself."

Xiang Shaolong groaned to himself. Lady Hua Yang must have seen something coming to drop him these hints and words of encouragement.

Her face becoming weary, Lady Hua Yang softly said, "I will not hold Grand Tutor back any longer. Will Qing'er send Grand Tutor out for me?"

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly kowtowed in farewell.

As Qin Qing walked him out of the room, the atmosphere was awkward. Strolling in silence, both of them are lost for words.

Outside the Empress Dowager palace, Xiang Shaolong greeted, "Grand Tutor Qin can send me till here. Thanks for your company."

Qin Qing's expression was cold as she returned his greeting. She plainly state, "Empress Dowager cares about me too much and said those words. Grand Tutor Xiang, please do not hold it against her."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "I am still holding the memory of my late wife and does not have any interest in relationships. Grand Tutor Qin, please rest easy."

Finishing, he left in huge strides, leaving Qin Qing dazed on the spot, thinking about his broken spirit.

It was snowing.

Xiang Shaolong was seated at the pavilion at the Hidden Dragon Abode, witnessing the first snowfall.

He clearly remember that the same time last year, he was preparing for his mission.

Zhao Qian, Chunying and her fellow maids was delighted to be on the trip while Cui Lu and Cui Tong were annoyed that they cannot come along.

Life goes on!

A petite and buxom female body pressed on his back. As he smelt her fragrance, a pair of tender hands covered his eyes. Soft lips came into contact with his ear and giggled, "Guess who I am?"

This is Wu Tingfang's favourite game. Xiang Shaolong pulled the hands apart and hugged the beauty laughing, "Talented Lady Ji wants to deceive me by pretending to be Fang'er?"

Her face glowing red under her white skin, Ji Yanran cheekily teased, "Can't you pretend to be tricked and make me happy? Miser!"

Xiang Shaolong gazed at this beauty who has enjoyed a long romance with him. He gratefully kissed her before asking, "Where are the rest of them?"

Ji Yanran embraced his thick neck and whined, "They have gone to see Little Teng Yi learn how to walk. That little fella sure knows how to make us happy!"

Xiang Shaolong was reminded that he is unable to procreate and was downcast. Ji Yanran coaxed, "Hubby need not blame himself. Heaven's will is beyond us. Let it be. With hubby around, we are satisfied already."

Perplexed, Xiang Shaolong changed the topic, "Any news of Godfather?"

Ji Yanran responded, "I received word from him three months ago and there hasn't been any updates. I am not worried about this old man! Touring the world without a single care or concern, he must be having a whale of a time."



She gladly added, "Second sister-in-law is pregnant again. If it is a boy, she will present him to us. We are mad with joy and cannot wait for her to give birth."

Xiang Shaolong thought about his close relationship with Teng Yi and his heart grew warm. He acknowledged that this is the best method since he came from a different time zone and lost the ability to conceive.

Ji Yanran teased, "Do you want to know the latest news?"

Since his return to Xianyang City, he has been trying to evade news reports. He is afraid to know what is happening outside, especially the potential news of Zhao Ya's death.

Kissing her, he gently pleaded, "Sure! Quickly share with me what you know before I seal your lips."

Ji Yanran giggled, "Then I will purposely not say it and enjoy your punishment first."

Xiang Shaolong reacted strongly and gave her a long French kiss. They shared a good kissing session.

After some time, Talented Lady Ji stopped to catch her breath, protesting, "I want to share good news with you! The issue you were worried about has materialised but only half of it. Empress Dowager Jing wanted Prince Xinling to kill Zhao Ya but Prince Xinling rejected her request and left for Qi. Empress Dowager Jing was incensed and was forced to accept Yan's proposal to cede five cities to Zhao but she got Lian Po to take over Wei's city of Fanyang. Isn't she courting

trouble? After losing thirty seven cities, she continued to provoke Wei.”

Xiang Shaolong was contented, “In this case, Prince Xinling is really true to Ya’er.”

Ji Yanran revealed, “It seems to be the case. Otherwise, why would Lady Ya give hubby up? Ai! She is in a dilemma too. She had betrayed Wu Family and is afraid to face everyone here in Xianyang City. She has been very upset over this issue and no one knows better than Zhi Zhi. But she dare not tell you!”

Instead, Xiang Shaolong was comforted that Zhao Ya was forced by circumstances rather than her wantonness.

Ji Yanran continued, “Lu Buwei will not let this opportunity pass. While Zhao and Wei are on bad terms, he ordered General Meng to invade Wei territory to share the spoils of war. They have succeeded in conquering Gaodu and Jixian. A pity that he was too ambitious and order Wang Ling to attack Zhao at the same time, forcing them to put aside their differences. I am sure with Prince Xinling’s reputation, he can unite the six states against Qin.”

Xiang Shaolong was confused, “I still do not understand why Lu Buwei is so anxious to fight Zhao. When I returned to Xianyang City, he told me he will attack Han and Zhao together. Now, he attacked Zhao but not Han. I wonder why.”

Ji Yanran smiled, “When has my hubby suddenly become so stupid? This is a clever strategy. Empress Dowager Jing is

from Han. With her in charge of Zhao, she can ally with Han to become a new strong and powerful state. Lu Buwei will never allow such a thing to happen. That is why he is attacking Zhao with all his forces to weaken them. King Xiaocheng has just passed away, Li Mu is engaged with the Xiong Nu, and Lian Po is busy fighting Yan. This is a golden opportunity that Lu Buwei will make full use of.”

Xiang Shaolong slapped his forehead, “My brain is not as good as Talented Lady Ji’s. It may even be Empress Ji’s idea. She and King Zhuangxiang hated Zhao to the core and must take some revenge on them.”

Ji Yanran commented, “It is easy to lose your self-control when you are successful. If the six states joined hands, Lu Buwei will suffer a huge defeat and will come looking to you for help again.”

Xiang Shaolong stared at the falling snow but his mind is full of images of the six states combined army fighting a fierce war with the Qin army.

Winter has gone and Spring is here. For every day that passed, Xiang Shaolong was living a day of fear. He is afraid to receive news about King Zhuangxiang’s death. From historical records, he died three years after ascending the throne. Now, the three years is almost up.

On this day, Wu Yingyuan and Wu Zhuo came back from the North. At the farm, they gathered Teng Yi, Jing Jun, Pu Bu, Liu Chao, Wu Guo and Xiang Shaolong for a discussion. Even Wu Tingwei who came back from a purchasing trip in

Guanzhong joined the discussion. Except for Tao Fang who is receiving news in Xianyang City, Wu Yingjie and Wu Yingen are present as well. Yingjie and Yingen are Wu Yingyuan's younger brothers. Basically, everyone of importance in the Wu household have all been assembled.

Everyone present could guess that Wu Yingyuan has something important to announce.

They were seated in the main hall and every door and window is shut tight. Family warriors guarded the house perimeter strictly.

Wu Yingyuan, the leader of the Wu household let out a long sigh, "Wu Zhuo has told me about what has transpired between Shaolong and Lu Buwei. Shaolong must not blame him. Your eldest brother must still take orders from me as the head of the household."

Wu Zhuo gave Xiang Shaolong a helpless look.

Wu Tingwei and the other two relatives have a serious look on their faces, showing that they have some knowledge of the matter.

Strictly speaking, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi are outsiders. However, Xiang Shaolong has married into the Wu family and Teng Yi, Jing Jun and Wu Zhuo are sworn brothers and have accomplished worthy merits to be included as part of the Wu household. Pu Bu and Liu Chao are leaders of the family warriors and are equal to Wu Guo in rank.

Wu Yingyuan bitterly laughed, "Our Wu family is populated by strong men and fine horses and we are well-versed in farming. It is natural that we incur jealousy. At first, I thought that by returning to Qin, where our ancestors come from, we score a great merit. Unfortunately, we ran into this outsider Lu Buwei. What I despise most is that we have been loyal to him and assisted him on many occasions. In the end, all we got was his heartless treatment and trickery. If not for Shaolong's abilities, he would have died by the river. Our late father has this advice passed down – if the enemy is too strong, we must flee."

Wu Yingjie enquired, "Among all the states, Qin is the strongest. Where else can we go?"

Wu Yingen added, "Even if any state is willing to accommodate us, we will still be rejected for no one will want to give Lu Buwei an excuse to attack them."

Wu Tingwei who has always been on loggerheads with Xiang Shaolong suggested, "Lu Buwei is only against Xiang Shaolong and not the Wu family. For the sake of everyone, why don't..."

Wu Yingyuan's face darkened and he furiously barked, "Shut up!"

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo exchanged a glance. Both felt that a leopard truly never changes its spots.

Wu Tingwei still does not know what is good for him. He protested, "I am only saying that Shaolong can leave here for the time being, not ..."

Wu Yingyuan blew his top and slapped the table, roaring, "It is my greatest regret to have an ungrateful and short-sighted son like you. Get the hell out of here. If you do not change for the better, you will not be included in future meetings."

Wu Tingwei's face changed colour dramatically. Staring viciously at Xiang Shaolong, he left in a huff.

The main hall was filled with an awkward silence.

Wu Yingjie and Wu Yingen furrowed their brows. Despite their silence, they appear to be unhappy with Wu Yingyuan discarding Wu Tingwei's suggestion.

Xiang Shaolong was filled with dread. His biggest support comes from the Wu Family. If this backing is gone, he will be helpless.

Normally, he will accept the suggestion and leave Qin. But with Xiao Pan's unfinished business, he cannot leave as yet.

Wu Zhuo broke the uneasiness, revealing, "On this trip, Master and I went north to conduct a survey. We discovered that there is a bigger world out there. For thousands of miles, not a single man can be seen. If we can lay down our foundations there, we can even build our own state and need not bend ourselves to the will of others."

Wu Yingen's countenance changed, "Eldest Brother must think over this carefully. Beyond the central plains are nomads and the Xiong Nu's territory. If we are unlucky, our entire family can be annihilated overnight."

Wu Yingyuan explained, "Our Wu Family's population is increasing every day. In fact, at least a child is born every day. In the long term, the best way out is to create our own state. Now that the seven states are fighting and not paying attention to the north, it will be the best time to move. Moreover, we have talented generals like Shaolong and Teng Yi. Who dares to mess with us?"

Wu Yingjie advised, "To build your own state is not done in one day. Eldest Brother, please reconsider. In Qin, the King and Queen favours Shaolong and Lu Buwei will not dare to do anything rash for the time being."

Wu Yingyuan's expression warmed up and smiled, "I am not suggesting that we leave straight away. On our trip, we met up with Shaolong's fourth brother Wang Jian and honestly told him about our situation. Wang Jian is a man who values relationships and has indicated that as long as he is fighting the Xiong Nu, he will do his best to protect us. We must look at the future. We can use a few years to look for fertile land in the north and lay our foundations first. When circumstances have changed, we still have a place to escape to. It will be disastrous if we do not have a backup plan and die empty-handed."

Wu Yingjie suggested, "Why not we let Shaolong take charge of this matter? It will be more appropriate."

Teng Yi and the rest sighed secretly. After all the hoo-hah, except for Wu Yingyuan who had great foresight, the rest of the Wu Family are hankering after wealth and enjoyment.

No one wanted to leave this rich and prosperous state of Qin.

Wu Yingyuan's face became solemn and scolded, "Isn't that as good as telling Lu Buwei we are dissatisfied with him? In case we come into conflict and Shaolong is not around, wouldn't we be finished?"

Wu Zhuo interrupted, "Starting a new enterprise is always the hardest but once we have a breakthrough, we can live happily for generations. We may be forced to act according to it but it may be a blessing in disguise. I shall take charge of this investigation beyond the central plains. With my specially trained army of one thousand Wu Family warriors, we may be a small force compared to professional armies but we can definitely defend ourselves well. Everyone can set their mind at ease."

Wu Yingyuan concluded, "We shall proceed as such. Do not hesitate and keep this a top secret. Nothing must be leaked out or we will punish according to the house rules. There will be no exceptions!"

Turning to Wu Zhuo, he hissed, "Go and warn that bastard to keep his mouth shut or don't blame me for not regarding him as my son."

Knocking sound was heard and a family warrior entered, proclaiming, "Premier Lu summons Grand Tutor!"

Everyone present was stunned.

Why is Lu Buwei looking for Xiang Shaolong?



## CHAPTER 12

### Win-Win Situation

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BY THE TIME Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi, Jing Jun and the Eighteen Guardians made their way to Xianyang City and proceeded straight to the Premier Residence. On their way, they ran into another slow moving carriage that was escorted by scores of Qin soldiers.

Xiang Shaolong was unaware of who is inside the carriage. He dare not be rude and rode slowly behind them.

The leader of the Qin soldiers in front suddenly ordered the entourage to move aside and waved to Xiang Shaolong's group to overtake them.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were surprised to experience such courtesy. However, the carriage blinds are down and they couldn't see who is inside.

Jing Jun knows best. Speaking to the Qin soldier at the end of the entourage, he rode up to them and whispered, "It is Xianyang City's number one beauty Qin Qing!"

Xiang Shaolong turned his head and looked back at her carriage. He had a wondrous feeling in his heart.

Xiang Shaolong wanted to meet Master Tu first and find out more about the reason for Lu Buwei wanting to see him but luck was not on his side.

Meeting him in the study, this political behemoth questioned, "Shaolong, why are you so rash? Before you seek my advice, you proposed Xu Xian the idiot to be the Left Premier to King Zhuangxiang. You have ruined my grand plan. Can't I even be away for a while without things screwing up?"

Xiang Shaolong had guessed that he could not deny this fact. With a ready answer, he smiled, "His Majesty wanted to pick someone on the spot and we are not sure when Premier will be back. My suggestion is meant to benefit you. By sharing some power with the Qin population, it shows that you are broad-minded and not a power-grabber. In this way, no one will dare to bad mouth you in the Qin court."

Lu Buwei was taken aback. His sharp eyes shining, he scrutinized him for a while before asking, "Is this the same reason why you rejected the post?"

Xiang Shaolong knew that he is slightly convinced and hurriedly nodded, "Premier Lu has treated us most generously. What is personal glory?"

Lu Buwei stared at the ceiling beams in his house and seemed moved. He suddenly offered, "I have three daughters and the youngest one is named Lu Niangrong. I shall now marry her to you as a form of replacement to Princess Qian."

Right now, Xiang Shaolong is faced with the most difficult decision of his life.

If he agreed, Lu Buwei will regard him as family. He can then easily help Xiao Pan ascend the throne and be the new King of Qin. Then he will turn the tables and kill this traitor. The Wu family will be safe as well.

But if he consented, he will have to betray his conscience and serve this traitor. In addition, accepting this Lu Niangrong will be unfair to Ji Yanran and the other wives.

Lu Buwei is the most ambitious and crafty businessman during these times. He will not strike a bargain unless he is sure that he will gain more at the end of the day.

He has eliminated his political adversary Lord Yangquan. Xiang Shaolong is the favourite of King Zhuangxiang and Empress Ji and cannot be killed. The best way is to absorb

him into his own ranks by making him his son-in-law. A top strategy indeed!

Xiang Shaolong gritted his teeth and kneeled down, speaking with resolution, "Premier Lu, please retract your offer. Shaolong's heart is dead and does not wish to be involved in any relationship, causing a lifetime of unhappiness to Miss Lu."

Lu Buwei was incensed. As he was about to force him, heavy knocking was heard on the door. A family warrior came in and kneeled down, reporting, "Premier Lu, I bring bad news. Wei's Prince Xinling has led the combined armies of Yan, Zhao, Han, Wei and Chu. They have broken through our fortifications on the east of the river. General Meng has been defeated at Hangu Pass. The combined armies are now rallying outside the pass."

These words strike them like a bolt from the sky. Forgetting their topic, they faced each other in confusion.

Lu Buwei jumped up crying, "It is disastrous. I must see the King at once."

Watching his back, Xiang Shaolong remembered Ji Yanran's prophecy and cannot believe that it is really happening. It has indirectly helped him to avoid an open conflict with Lu Buwei.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi left the Premier residence. In this turbulent period, they dare not leave and returned to the Wu family residence. There, they will receive the latest news.

The moment they stepped into the door, Tao Fang welcomed them. With a strange expression on his face, he informed, "Shaolong, there is a man waiting for you. He claims to be well-acquainted with you. It is funny how he would know that you will be coming today."

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed and went to receive this guest in the guest room.

The guest wore a bamboo hat to block out the sun. With his back facing the door, he sat upright and has a mysterious aura around him.

Xiang Shaolong found his back familiar but could not recognise who it may be.

The guest heard footsteps but still did not turn back.

Xiang Shaolong sat down opposite him and noticed that his cheeks is covered with a nice beard but he cannot see the eyes underneath the bamboo hat.

Just as he was about to ask, the strange man slowly remove his hat.

Xiang Shaolong was blown away. "My Lord!" he exclaimed.

Lord Longyang's pretty face may have been hidden by the beard and his eyelashes have become thicker but Xiang Shaolong will recognize those seductive eyes anywhere.

After they exchanged glances, Lord Longyang smiled, "Brother Dong is truly a passionate man who does not forget his friends."

Xiang Shaolong laughed bitterly, "In the end, I still cannot deceive you."

Lord Longyang explained, "Dong Horse Fanatic will not die so easily and Xiang Shaolong will not return to Xianyang City without completing his mission. I even sent someone to Chu to verify this. Coincidentally, Dong Horse Fanatic's family has just been wiped out by barbarians. Other people may think this is a trick but I believe the real Dong Horse Fanatic is dead while the fake Dong Horse Fanatic is having a great time in Xianyang City. Otherwise, Zhao Zhi will not come all the way to Xianyang City."

Xiang Shaolong guessed that he could no longer deceive him and sighed, "Prince Xinling has just defeated the Qin army. Does Lord know that it is dangerous to come all the way here?"

Lord Longyang replied, "Of course I know. I am here precisely because the Qin army is defeated."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Is Lady Ya doing well?"

Lord Longyang smiled bitterly and retrieved a clear jade bangle from his bosom. He gently disclosed, "Zhao Ya wanted me to give this to you, showing that her love for you will never change. The love will be external like jade. Due to circumstances and not to put you in a difficult position, she did not look for you in Xianyang City. She hope you will understand her difficulties."

Xiang Shaolong held the bangle tightly in his hand and was grieved. After a while, he asked in a deep voice, "What can I do for you?"

Lord Longyang sighed, "It is all because of our Prince Zhen that was held hostage here in Xianyang City. With the defeat of the Qin army, he will be tortured and even killed as a form of revenge. My King dotes on this son and even I have to risk my life to save him."

Xiang Shaolong was reminded that when a state loses the war, they will normally give up an important member of the royal family as a hostage in the winning state. Qin has been victorious and must have several hostages in Xianyang City. Feeling a headache coming, he asked, "How does Lord want Shaolong to help him?"

Lord Longyang pleaded, "King Zhuangxiang and Lu Buwei regard Brother Xiang highly. If Brother Xiang can put in a few good words, you can keep Prince Zhen alive."

Xiang Shaolong concluded, "Lord can put your mind at ease. Based on our friendship, I will do whatever I can."

Despite his promise, he remembered that Lu Buwei was becoming more and more vicious and had no idea how to help him.

Lord Longyang was delighted and was about to give his thanks when Tao Fang came in and interrupted, "The King has summoned Shaolong to the palace."

Xiang Shaolong stood up and advised, "Brother Long, please stay here and wait for my news."

Instructing Tao Fang to take good care of his guest, he rode furiously to the palace.

For the first time ever, the leader of the palace guards, An Gu escorted him personally. He was brought to a Command Centre in the back palace. An Gu was extremely friendly and Xiang Shaolong felt like he is trying to curry favour with him.

An Gu is tall, handsome and imposing. Around the age of twenty five, he is of royal blood despite not sharing the same surname. The leader of the palace guards is normally related to the royal family to ensure their loyalty. Even with Lu Buwei's manipulation, he cannot change this system. Otherwise, the safety of the Qin King will be in his hands.

An Gu seems to be trying to say something to Xiang Shaolong. When they cross the big courtyard between the palaces, he whispered, "We, the palace guards, are pleased that Grand Tutor Xiang promoted Xu Xian to be the Left Premier."

Xiang Shaolong was finally enlightened on why he is receiving special treatment.

Xu Xian is a talented man but was discounted by Lu Buwei. With Xiang Shaolong supporting him, he naturally won the respect of the military.

As they walked down the long corridor, the palace guards saluted them on both sides. Xiang Shaolong felt extremely



proud and prestigious. For a moment, he was intoxicated in all the attention.

An Gu delivered him straight to the Command Centre. The palace guards pushed open the giant door and he entered alone.

The moment he stepped inside, he had a great shock.

King Zhuangxiang was seated his dragon throne on a raised platform. In front of him, there were two rows of important-looking officials.

On the right is Right Premier Lu Buwei and on the left is Left Premier Xu Xian. He also recognized Great General Wang Ling<sup>1</sup>, Lord Guanzhong Cai Ze and General Du Bi. These are the men he met at the duel with Wang Jian. These three men are high-ranking officials and so must be the other five that he hasn't met before.

Xiang Shaolong paid his respects to the King and officials.

King Zhuangxiang was glad to see him and exclaimed, "Grand Tutor Xiang, please rise!"

When Xiang Shaolong got up, Lu Buwei quickly introduced him to the rest of the officials, taking the chance to illustrate their close relationship.

Among the three men that he knew, Wang Ling and Du Bi are important military leaders. They are of the same rank as Wang Jian and Xu Xian. Cai Ze is the Right Premier before Lu

---

<sup>1</sup> Wang Ling - In JEAN's translation it was Wang He. Must be a typo. In the later chapters, Meng Tian's name was somehow written as Meng Tin too. I will stick to Wang Ling.

Buwei was promoted. Despite retiring from his post, his services are still very much sought after.

One of the newcomers is General Lu Gong who is one of the three Tiger-Generals besides Wang Jian and Xu Xian. He was stocky and around the age of fifty. He has a long beard, thick eyebrows, glittering eyes and a tough built. When he saw Xiang Shaolong, he scrutinised him in an unfriendly manner.

The other four men are Left Marquis Wang Wan, Right Marquis Jia Gongcheng, Lord Yunyang Ying Ao and Lord Yiqu Ying Lou. The last two men are related to the King and are feudal lords.

Everyone has a wooden expression on their face and most of them regarded Xiang Shaolong coldly. Even Xu Xian who ought to be grateful is of no exception. Only Cai Ze and Wang Wan are more courteous.

This emergency meeting has gathered all the important officials in Xianyang City. From this point, Xiang Shaolong can guess how serious the situation is.

Qin's biggest fear is the unity of the six states. With only the armies of five states, Prince Xinling has defeated the Qin army. It shows that the Qin's fear is not without reason.

Xiang Shaolong naturally knew where he should stand. Moving to Lu Buwei's row, he copied the officials' posture and clasped his hands in front of him.

King Zhuangxiang was as composed as usual. He softly asked, "Does Shaolong know why I have summoned you so urgently?"

Xiang Shaolong could sense trouble coming.

This military meeting has been going on for at least four hours and a solution should have been found. To summon him urgently is to naturally get him to lead an army against Prince Xinling's forces.

He could also tell that Lu Buwei may be controlling the politics of Qin but in terms of military, he is still inexperienced. With Meng Ao's defeat, he can only rely on Xiang Shaolong to fight for him.

He may have won some skirmishes but has never led tens of thousands of soldiers in a ferocious battle with the enemy. No wonder the officials are dissatisfied with him.

Xiang Shaolong respectfully said, "I am ignorant!"

Xu Xian cut in, "Your Majesty, please reconsider!"

Lu Gong and the rest of the officials voiced their objections as well.

General Du Bi added, "The combined army is enjoying high morale after their victory. If we disregard Hangu Pass and attack them rashly, we will lose the Pass if we are defeated again. When that happens, the enemies can follow through and annihilate Qin. It is better to defend than to attack in this scenario."

Lu Buwei's face darkened and he coldly said, "We suffered a defeat because the enemy attacked us unexpectedly. This time, we are ready for them and the consequences will be different."

Lu Gong retorted, "Prince Xinling is a clever and scheming person. That year, he destroyed our forces outside Handan City. History can always repeat itself. How can Right Premier assume that the battle will be so easy?"

Xu Xian added, "Our forces have just been defeated and their morale is low. Unless Sun Wu is reborn, we should retreat. Will Your Majesty please reconsider?"

This is his second time advising King Zhuangxiang to reconsider. This shows how strongly he objects to King Zhuangxiang's decision.

Lu Buwei angrily state, "Taiyuan Province, Sanchuan Province and Shangdang Province are crucial to our expansion plans. If we allow the idiot Wuji to blockade us at the Pass, the three provinces will fall. This will strengthen the enemy and weaken us concurrently. Your Majesty, please think about it."

King Zhuangxiang decided, "I have made up my mind. I hereby decree..."

In this decisive moment, an attendant announced, "Prince Zhen of Wei is here!"

Lu Buwei coldly hissed, "I must kill this man to appease my anger!"

King Zhuangxiang was about to summon Prince Zhen to enter the Command Centre when Xiang Shaolong leapt out. Kneeling down, he kowtowed, "Your Majesty, I have something to say."

Everyone present was taken aback at his outburst.

In actual fact, Xiang Shaolong did not know what to say as well. All he knew that if Prince Zhen came in and was sentenced to death by King Zhuangxiang, he would fail to keep his promise to Lord Longyang.

He has a complicated relationship with Lord Longyang but since he asked, he feels obligated to help him. Just based on his protection of Zhao Ya, Xiang Shaolong had to do his best.

Astonished, King Zhuangxiang questioned, "What does Shaolong wish to say?"

As Xiang Shaolong was thinking of an excuse, he had a brainwave and replied, "From what I just heard, we will suffer losses regardless of our decision to attack or defend. I have thought of a win-win situation where we can resolve the present danger without losing a single soldier."

Everyone was amazed and wondered what brilliant plan he may have.

King Zhuangxiang has the most confidence in Xiang Shaolong. That is the reason he accepted Lu Buwei's recommendation to get Xiang Shaolong to fight Prince Xinling. Pleased, he implored, "Tell me what you have in mind."

Xiang Shaolong began, "The sole reason that the five states can work together and combine their armies is due to Prince Wuji. If this man is gone, the combined armies will disperse and the three provinces will be safe."

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Even Lu Buwei wished he had a win-win solution too. He is fighting alone in this war and gambling his career on it. If he suffers another defeat, he will have to forfeit Hangu Pass and naturally, his control over it.

Xiang Shaolong explained, "On my trip to Daliang..."

Without hiding any details, he revealed Prince Xinling's plot to kill King Anli. He concluded, "As long as I tell this story to Prince Zhen and let him tell this story to King Anli, King Anli's suspicions will be raised. He will fear that when Wei Wuji returns after his victory, he will take the opportunity to kill Anli and take the throne for himself. Therefore, he will summon Wuji back to Wei and confiscate his military seal. The combined armies will fall apart without him."

Everyone acknowledged that this is a good strategy.

Everyone knows that Prince Xinling is not on good terms with the King of Wei. When Prince Xinling stole the military seal to save Zhao, he stayed in Handan City and dared not return to Wei. Only till Qin attacked Wei and Anli was forced to the corner did he summoned Prince Xinling home. No one will believe that Anli is not jealous of Prince Xinling.

The people of Qin love to sow discord among their enemies.

When Bai Qi attacked Changping, he sowed discord between Lian Po and King Xiaocheng. Eventually, King Xiaocheng replaced Lian Po with Zhao Kuo and they suffered heavy losses.

A small plot is sometimes more powerful than a huge army.

Xu Xian frowned, "Grand Tutor Xiang's suggestion is brilliant but I am still puzzled. If we release Prince Zhen back to Wei with this story, wouldn't they know that we are sowing discord?"

Du Bi agreed, "This is a good plan but it is hard to achieve the desired result."

Xiang Shaolong is not surprised at Du Bi's criticism. After all, he belongs to Prince Chengqiao's camp. He must have been a powerful figure and was not dragged down with Lord Yangquan.

Lu Buwei will not show any mercy to his enemies. This man must be of some substance to be able to survive till today.

Xiang Shaolong lied, "Three days ago, Lord Longyang from Wei sent someone to contact me. He wanted me to safeguard the life of Prince Zhen. If I pretend to work with them and helped the Prince escape and at the same time share my story with them, this strategy will succeed."

King Zhuangxiang praised, "Shaolong lives up to my expectations. This is a wonderful plan. We shall do as you say. Please see to it immediately."

Xu Xian wanted to avoid fighting at the Pass. Lu Buwei was relieved that he did not have to take any further risks. The discussion topic switched to how to communicate the story to Prince Zhen without arousing his suspicions.

After the discussion, King Zhuangxiang summoned Prince Zheng and gave him a thorough scolding. Lu Buwei suggested sentencing him to death.

Prince Zhen was terrified and fainted on the floor with his face pale with shock. Xiang Shaolong stepped forward and pleaded for mercy, cursing Prince Xinling. Under King Zhuangxiang's interrogation, he revealed Prince Xinling's plot.

At the end of the day, Prince Zheng was spared the gallows. He was placed under house arrest and to await further orders.

King Zhuangxiang and Lu Buwei continued to speak while Xiang Shaolong left with the other high-ranking officials.

Everyone's attitude towards him improved tremendously and heaped praises on him. Only Du Bi left without saying a single word.

Lu Gong and Xu Xian walked together with Xiang Shaolong.

Lu Gong suddenly asked, "Why did you propose General Xu Xian to King Zhuangxiang?"

Xiang Shaolong was moved by his frank question and replied awkwardly, "He is a hero who does not bend his principles. It is as simple as that."



Xu Xian seriously commented, "Xiang Shaolong is the real hero. I will never be able to reach Grand Tutor's level where you disregard power and authority. If you had said yes that day, you will be our Left Premier. If you said yes today, you will be our Commander in Chief."

Within a very short period, Xiang Shaolong has won the respect of the Qin military. He himself found it hard to believe.

When they are about to reach their carriages, a palace maid kneeled at the side, greeting, "Grand Tutor Xiang, please hold your step."

Xu Xian and Lu Gong knew that he is close to Empress Ji and Prince Zheng. He may have been summoned by Empress Ji. They left first but not before promising to have dinner with him in the near future.

Xiang Shaolong thought that it was Zhu Ji as well. Just as he groaned to himself, the palace maid presented him with an intricate and well-painted box. She left immediately after that.

When Xiang Shaolong opened the painted box, a whiff of fragrance filled his nose. Inside the box, there is a piece of silk paper that was neatly folded. When he opened the paper, he discovered that it was a letter written concisely and orderly. Consisting of a few sentences, it was written in Qin writing style and it was signed off as Qin Qing.

He was afraid and delighted at the same time, thinking that the beauty wanted to share her true feelings with him. After

he finished reading, he realised that Qin Qing wanted to invite Ji Yanran to stay over at her place for a few days.

He sighed with relief but could feel some hint of disappointment. His emotions are clashing over this beauty.

Until he went back to join Teng Yi, his mind is still filled with her gracefulness, her charming ways and her warm expression.

Back at the Wu residence, he went to find Lord Longyang.

Xiang Shaolong told Lord Longyang the entire story without leaving any details out. Lord Longyang was astounded, "Since this is a trick, why are you telling me about it?"

Xiang Shaolong shrugged his shoulders, "Lord trusts me deeply and how can I lie to you?"

Lord Longyang asked again, "Is it really true that Prince Xinling wants to assassinate King Anli?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded, "That is really the truth."

Lord Longyang predicted, "So be it. Although you meant to sow discord, but this is a true incident. If the Qin army holes up in the Pass, Prince Xinling will have to retreat sooner or later and it doesn't make a difference to me. After this episode, the world will experience peace for a while. My mission is more urgent, which is to escort Prince Zhen back to Daliang. Shaolong must put up a convincing act and we will both stand to benefit."

Xiang Shaolong naturally understood his meaning.

Lord Longyang has been on loggerheads with Prince Xinling, often plotting against each other. With this evidence to topple him, he will finally get his chance.

Prince Xinling is the mastermind behind the death of Xiao Zhao and the other maids. How he wished he could slice him into two. But on the other hand, he was concerned about Zhao Ya's safety.

Lord Longyang is a true genius and saw right through him. He assured, "Rest easy. Prince Wuji is famed throughout the six states and King Anli dared not take his life. It is not as simple as you think. Anli will only confiscate his military seal and make him idle. No matter what, I will protect Zhao Ya."

Xiang Shaolong could finally remove that burden on his mind. He continued to discuss the 'rescue operation' with Lord Longyang. That every night, they 'easily' rescued Prince Zhen and even provided travel documents to cross the Pass. Lord Longyang and Prince Zhen hurried back to Wei.

To evade Lu Buwei's marriage proposal, he rushed back to the farm, riding non-stop even at night.

His mood is improving by leaps and bounds, finally resuming the cheerful days he had with his three wives and the Tian sisters.

Shan Lan gave birth to a baby boy and presented him to Xiang Shaolong. It was double happiness for him.

In the midst of all the celebrations, a unique visitor showed up at the farm. It was Master Tu Xian.

This General Manager of the Premier Residence has a serious look on his face. The minute he sat down, he sighed, "We are in trouble!"

# VOLUME 12

## CHAPTER 1

### Internal And External Problems

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG was terrified. If a composed and experienced man like Master Tu says we are in trouble, then

we are really in big trouble. He quickly asked for an explanation.

Master Tu started, "Your brother-in-law came looking for Lu Buwei last night and they chatted for almost four hours. After their discussion, Lu Buwei ordered Lu Xiong and myself to spy on your activities. In addition, he threw a tantrum and cursed you, scolding that you do not know what is good for you and even helped Xu Xian become the Left Premier. I am certain that your brother-in-law betrayed you."

Xiang Shaolong was mortified. In a state of panic, he summoned Teng Yi and his father-in-law and updated them on this development.

Wu Yingyuan slammed the table heavily and cursed, "How dare he betray his own family! I will sentence him to death according to the house rules."

Teng Yi's face was filled with dread as well. If Lu Buwei actively plots against them, they will be in deep trouble.

Xiang Shaolong deduced, "We are not sure what Tingwei has told Lu Buwei. If Lu Buwei knows everything, he will evade me or send an assassin after me immediately. He will not allow me to continue working for him."

In the short span of time, Wu Yingyuan seemed to have aged a few years. He sighed, "Luckily, I did not say much to that bastard. I only mentioned that Lu Buwei is an accommodating man on the surface but is very jealous of people who are more capable than him. Therefore, he is not very dependable. With the King and Queen favouring

Shaolong, he will be extremely envious. We must take early precautions and prepare an exit strategy for ourselves. It is really fortunate that I did not tell them the other details.”

Teng Yi commented in a deep voice, “From my point of view, Master Tingwei is not that brave. He must have had the backing of some of the other Wu Family members to act like this. We must not act rashly but conduct some investigations first.”

Master Tu nodded, “Brother Teng is right. If you do something harsh to Master Tingwei now, you will only raise Lu Buwei’s suspicions and he will know that you have a spy in his residence.”

Wu Yingyuan sighed and his eyes are shimmering with tears. After all, Wu Tingwei is his own flesh and blood. How can he not be heart-broken?

Master Tu added, “Lu Buwei is a genius. Seeing that Shaolong retreated to the farms after his mission and even prepared an exit strategy, he will guess that you have discovered his plot. If this matter is leaked out, it is highly detrimental to him. He will never let you off.”

Wu Yingyuan wiped away his tears and coldly snorted, “Everyone in Qin has a good opinion of Shaolong and our farms are performing well. What can he do to us?”

Master Tu explained, “Recently, Lu Buwei recruited a famous swordsman. Like Lian Jin whom Shaolong killed, he is from Wei and is Lian Jin’s martial brother. Named Guan Zhongxie, his frame is even bigger than Shaolong and Brother Teng. I

believe that he is stronger Xiao Weimou. He possesses top sword skills, excellent riding skills and can fight against a hundred men. He is also gifted with sharp intelligence and has become Lu Buwei's confidante. Now, he is responsible for training Lu Buwei's family warriors, making Lu Buwei even more powerful. You must not let your guard down against him."

Teng Yi and Xiang Shaolong could feel their goose pimples rising. If this man is stronger than Xiao Weimou, they will not be his match.

They managed to kill Xiao Weimou that fateful day because he was injured by their arrow. Otherwise, it will be hard to determine who will be the eventual winner.

Wu Yingyuan inquired, "Has Master Tu exchange blows with him before?"

Master Tu bitterly smiled, "We exchanged a few stances. Although there was no clear victor, I know he is way better than me. Otherwise, I will not bring him up."

Everyone was blown away.

Master Tu is the best swordsman in Lu Buwei's residence. If he says he is way behind Guan Zhongxie, then Guan Zhongxie is indeed formidable.

Teng Yi predicted; "With this man helping Lu Buwei, they may arrange a dinner with a friendly match for entertainment and force Shaolong to fight him. On this pretext, they can kill Shaolong and blame it on carelessness.



This is not a private duel and it is common for Qin people to have friendly matches during dinner. By that time, Shaolong is dead and King Zhuangxiang cannot hold it against Lu Buwei.”

Wu Yingyuan does not know much about Xiao Weimou. Thus, he is full of confidence in Xiang Shaolong. He coldly laughed, “Is Shaolong so easy to kill? But you must take extra care when you leave the farm.”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself – Before he openly clash with Lu Buwei, there are many things he cannot avoid. He sighed, “Lu Buwei has been recruiting men of talent everywhere. Are there any others worth mentioning?”

Master Tu continued, “In terms of knowledge, there is a guy named Mo Ao. This man is awfully smart and is like a walking encyclopaedia. However, he has an evil heart and I am sure it was him who thought of the scheme to ambush you at the red pine forest. He is well-versed in poisons and he was suspected to have poisoned the late king.”

Teng Yi frowned, “Even you have no idea?”

Master Tu sighed, “Mo Ao married Lu Buwei’s sister and is considered his relative. Such an important issue is only known to his own clansmen. Even I, who have been with him for almost two decades, am kept in the dark. Now, they are trying to restrict my followers. Ai!” Finishing, he has a hurt expression on his face.

Wu Yingyuan could not hold back, asking, "Why doesn't Master Tu follow Mister Xiao's example and leave his residence?"

Master Tu's face darkened and he gritted his teeth, "Such a heartless man, I want to see what kind of retribution he will receive. Fortunately, I am still of value to him. As long as he does not know that I have seen through him, he will not make trouble for me. On the surface, he is still acting like someone who values brotherhood and relationships."

Xiang Shaolong sighed with him, "In terms of knowledge, there is Mo Ao. In terms of martial arts, who is a potential threat?"

Master Tu divulged, "There are three men. Although they are not as skilled as Guan Zhongxie, they are first rate fighters as well. They are Lu Chan, Zhou Zihen and Du (poison)."

Xiang Shaolong was shaken, "Du?"

The other three men stared at him, astounded.

Master Tu was curious, "Do you know him? He may be from Zhao but has left Zhao three years ago. In the end, he went to Han and seduce Han Chuang's wife. Han Chuang sent assassins after him and he was forced to come to Xianyang City. I don't think Shaolong has met him before."

Xiang Shaolong was tongue tied. In the Qin Shihuang movie, Du was an important spy. He conspired with Zhu Ji and left Lu Buwei's control. He cause chaos to the Qin court and

even secretly rebelled. But how can he tell them about all these?

He lied, "Nothing. I just felt that his name sounds funny!"

The three men continue to eye him suspiciously.

Xiang Shaolong waved his hand and added, "Honestly, I don't know why but when I heard this name, I do not feel comfortable. Hei! What kind of person is he?"

With his excuse, everyone was relieved and their suspicions disappeared.

Originally, Teng Yi is fearless. With a pretty wife and a beautiful son, his thinking is no longer the same as before.

Master Tu thought hard and replied, "Du is very good with psychological attacks. His flattery skill is second to none and is highly favoured by Lu Buwei. With dashing good looks, he attracts women like honey attracts ants. In Xianyang City, he is the most popular guest in the brothels."

Pausing, he added, "He is blessed by the heaven to have the best sexual stamina and his record is ten women in one sitting. Lu Buwei loves to use him to seduce the wives and maids of his enemies, gathering important intelligence. Hng! Nonetheless, he is another heartless cad and has destroyed countless marriages. If not for Lu Buwei shielding him, he will be murdered long ago."

The four men quietened down.

Among Lu Buwei's recruits, there are many 'unorthodox' people. Going against him will not be easy.

Wu Yingyuan sighed again, "Isn't Master Tu afraid that Lu Buwei will suspect you for visiting us like this?"

Master Tu explained, "I came here on his orders to invite Shaolong to attend a banquet at his residence three days later. I have no idea why Shaolong is invited and Master Wu is left out. I am sure he is up to no good."

Xiang Shaolong recalled Lu Buwei's marriage proposal and sighed, "I will do my best to counter him. We shall see what the future will bring. After all, some things just cannot be avoided."

Wu Yingyuan commented, "External threats are frightening but internal strife is worse. If I do not harden my heart and cleanse my household, I will regret it when we suffer in the future."

Master Tu advised, "You must not act rashly or even let Master Tingwei know that he has been found out. In fact, you can use him to create a false impression in front of Lu Buwei."

Turning to Xiang Shaolong, he swore, "Lu Buwei is the most scheming man I have ever seen. In Xianyang City, you are the only one who can match up to him. He has Master Tingwei spying for him; you have me spying for you. Let's see who will have the last laugh."

Xiang Shaolong regained his composure and smiled, "I will not make big promises but as long as I am alive, I will seek justice for our dead brothers and Princess Qian."

Back at his backyard, his three wives and the Tian sisters are playing with his son happily.

Despite his terrible mood, he picked up his son Bao'er, whom Ji Yanran named, and cuddled him. Witnessing the cheerfulness of the ladies and thinking about the danger that is upon them, he is experiencing mixed feelings.

The beautiful and clever Ji Yanran could tell that something is bothering him. Pulling him aside, she asked for the reason.

Xiang Shaolong updated her about Wu Tingwei's betrayal and warned, "We must remind Tingfang not to tell this brat anything about our last mission."

After thinking it over, Ji Yanran suggested, "I have a better plan. We will get Tingfang to create a false impression that Tingwei will believe with a doubt. When the word is passed to Lu Buwei, we may be able to trick him!"

Xiang Shaolong was hard-pressed and questioned, "What reason can we use for hiding in the farms and avoiding Lu Buwei?"

Ji Yanran detailed, "We can make use of Lu Xiong. We can say we guessed Lu Xiong and Lord Yangquan are communicating secretly. Therefore, we suspect Lu Buwei may be involved. This way, Lu Buwei's greatest secret is still

preserved. His greatest fear is that we know that it was not Lord Yangquan who ambushed us.”

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed and kissed her, praising, “Great idea! With you this female Zhuge providing me with good strategies, what is there to fear?”

Ji Yanran was stunned, “What is female Zhuge?”

Xiang Shaolong knew that he has a slip of the tongue. Zhuge Liang belongs to the era of the Three Kingdoms and will be born a few hundred years later. Of course Talented Lady Ji does not know who he is.

Coincidentally, Zhao Zhi came over and exclaimed, “Sister Rou is making me worried and did not even write us a single letter. Sister Lan is annoyed that she did not come to see her.”

Xiang Shaolong was reminded about Shan Rou and thought of Zhao Ya at the same time. His mood just got better after Ji Yanran’s suggestion but now it got worse again.

After coaxing Zhao Zhi, Xiang Shaolong faced Ji Yanran and informed, “We are going back to Xianyang City tomorrow. Didn’t Qin Qing invite you to stay over at her place? Let’s travel together.”

Ji Yanran giggled in agreement. She went to get Wu Tingfang into their rooms and proceeded to tell her about their plan.

Xiang Shaolong could not bear to see Wu Tingfang upset over his own brother’s betrayal. He went to find Teng Yi to practice their Mohist swordplay.

To face the incoming danger, he must be in top form.

In these tumultuous times, you must possess both brains and brawn.

The next ten years will be the most difficult time of their lives.

As they were leaving for Xianyang City, they discovered that Wu Yingyuan has fallen ill.

Xiang Shaolong's father-in-law has always been in the pink of health and is rarely sick. This sudden illness must have been created by his anger at his son's betrayal.

Xiang Shaolong instructed Wu Tingfang to take good care of him and left. Still worried about him, he rode towards Xianyang City with Ji Yanran, Teng Yi, Jing Jun and the Eighteen Guardians.

Wu Zhou and his elite army have left the farm for many months. Although there is no word from him, Xiang Shaolong is assured that they will be safe with Wang Jian's protection.

At dawn, they entered the city. Suppressing the desire to check out Qin Qing's home, he got a delighted Jing Jun to escort Ji Yanran to Qin Qing's residence near the palace. He returned to the Wu residence with Teng Yi.

The moment they stepped into the house, they saw Wu Tingwei quarrelling with Tao Fang. We Tingwei saw them coming and coldly greeted them. He then left in a huff.

Tao Fang shook his head sighing, "He is beyond control!"

After they got seated, Tao Fang explained, "Two days ago, he wanted five taels of gold from me. Today, he wanted another five taels. I don't mind giving it to him but when Master Wu questions me about it, how am I supposed to reply him? Hng! I heard he is bewitched with the courtesan Dan Meimei from Drunken Wind brothel. No wonder he is spending uncontrollably. A nitwit will always be a nitwit. He gives his gold to the woman and the woman will give the gold to her gigolo."

Xiang Shaolong cannot imagine that this is already in practice during these ancient times. He took the opportunity to ask, "Which gigolo has this ability to make the courtesan pay for his services?"

Tao Fang replied with disdain, "That handsome boy from Premier Lu Residence. He bragged that he can use his organ and block the wheel of a donkey cart. The cart will not be able to move at all despite the donkey pulling. Can you believe that?"

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi exchanged glances, knowing that there is more to it than meets the eye.

Xiang Shaolong inquired in a deep voice, "Is it Du (poison)?"

Tao Fang was astounded, "You heard about him too?"

Tao Fang did not know about Wu Tingwei's betrayal and Xiang Shaolong took this chance to tell him about it.



Tao Fang's face was full of disappointment, sighing, "I should have seen this coming. Since Shaolong came into our family, you have outshone this arrogant bastard. He will not submit to you. Moreover, Xianyang City is full of nightlife and entertainment. For him to leave here and relocate to the wilderness is as good as killing him."

Teng Yi cautioned, "It seems like Lu Buwei is controlling him via Du and Dan Meimei. We must be on high alert. If Lu Buwei manages to eliminate Master Wu, the family business and warriors will fall into the hands of this nitwit. With the family elders supporting him, we can no longer stay in Wu Family!"

Tao Fang's face was deathly white, quavering, "Young Master will not be so daring!"

Xiang Shaolong coldly snorted, "Bewitched by women and psychological coercion, there is nothing he will not do. There is actually no difference between betraying the family to Lu Buwei and killing his own father."

Teng Yi recalled, "Do you remember Mo Ao whom Master Tu mentioned? He is a poisons expert and can kill people without a trace. We must guard against him."

Tao Fang's expression has become ugly beyond measure. He stood up and affirmed, "Let me make a trip back to the farm and have a good talk with Master Wu."

Xiang Shaolong nodded, "Father-in-law is sick and bedridden. It is a good time to visit him."

Tao Fang and Wu Yingyuan share a close relationship. Upon hearing this, he left quickly.

The moment he left, a palace attendant came, summoning Xiang Shaolong to see King Zhuangxiang.

Before he can even finish his tea, Xiang Shaolong left with the attendant.

At the palace, the leader of the palace guards An Gu welcomed, "The King was about to send someone to the farms. It was good that you are in the City and we did not have to make the trip."

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "What is it that he summoned me so urgently?"

An Gu whispered into his ear, "Wei has retreated!"

Xiang Shaolong was reminded about his trick to sow discord and thought about Zhao Ya's safety now that Prince Xinling is in trouble.

An Gu added, "After Grand Tutor has seen the King, please follow me to the Crown Prince palace. Study attendant Li wishes to have a good chat with you."

For a while, Xiang Shaolong does not remember having such an acquaintance. Then he realised that it was Li Si and cheered, "I wish to see him too! Marshall An must be very familiar with him by now."

As An Gu led him into the corridor that goes deeper into the inner palace, he smiled, "He is very knowledgeable and has

earned our respect. Even King Zhuangxiang, Empress Ji and Prince Zheng are full of praise for his farsightedness.”

Xiang Shaolong was highly amused. In fact, he is the most ‘far-sighted’ man during these ancient times. The people that he recommends can never go wrong. If Li Si cannot even impress these people, how can he be Qin’s second-in-command in the future?

This man is well-versed in legalism which is the same frequency as Shang Yang’s reforms. It suits the needs of Qin well.

A study attendant may be a lowly post but it is a post that gives him plenty of exposure to the Crown Prince. With genuine abilities and his support of Xiao Pan, his career will naturally soar in the future.

In the midst of his thoughts, he unknowingly came in front of a pair of majestic doors.

Entering the room, King Zhuangxiang’s joyous words were heard, “Come here Shaolong! You have scored a huge merit for Qin. I must reward you handsomely.”

Xiang Shaolong glanced at him and the officials assembled in front of him. The two Premiers Lu Buwei and Xu Xian, Lu Gong, Jia Gongcheng, Cai Ze, Ying Lou, Ying Ao and Wang Ling are all present. Compared to the previous session, only General Du Bi, who disliked him, is absent.

He hurriedly knelt down and declared, "It is my duty to do my best for Qin. Your Majesty need not give me any reward."

King Zhuangxiang laughed, "You may rise! Without losing lives, we managed to resolve the situation. This kind of strategy is the best!"

Getting back on his feet, he peeped at Lu Buwei. A murderous look flashed across his eyes before he faked a smile, "Shaolong is a man who is humble about his achievements. He has yet to accumulate any military contributions. Your Majesty can let him lead an army into battle in near future. When he comes back victorious, we can reward him accordingly. Wouldn't that be better?"

Xiang Shaolong had just sat down and was thinking hard about the murderous look. He must be extra careful about the banquet tomorrow night. Otherwise, he may be killed when invited to duel at the friendly match.

From King Zhuangxiang's words, it proves that he does not like wars and deaths. This is the complete reverse of Lu Buwei's wild ambitions.

Lu Gong laughed heartily, "Left Premier's thinking is too rigid. Without losing a soldier, the army of Wei has retreated and the other four armies are in a state of disarray. Isn't this a military contribution?"

King Zhuangxiang was thrilled, "My sentiments exactly. What suggestions do the rest of you have?"

Everyone pretended to be deaf and dumb. They already knew that King Zhuangxiang has a favourable impression of Xiang Shaolong and will not bother objecting. After discussion, Xiang Shaolong was appointed as an Imperial Marshal serving to protect King Zhuangxiang. This is the same rank as An Gu. If King Zhuangxiang ever goes to war personally, he and An Gu will be his two bodyguards. However, it is only a title without any military authority.

Everyone offered their congratulations.

Under the present circumstances, there is no way Xiang Shaolong can reject him. At the same time, he realised that King Zhuangxiang's promotion has pushed him closer to a open conflict with Lu Buwei.

In the past when he was dealing with the formidable Zhao Mu, he did not have any reservations. However, it was stated in history that after King Zhuangxiang passed away, there will be ten solid years that Lu Buwei will dominate Qin politics and no one is his match. Also wondering if he will die under his treacherous hands, he was filled with dread and confusion.

His incomplete knowledge about his fate and the future is becoming a mental burden.

After further discussions, King Zhuangxiang invited Xiang Shaolong to have dinner with him and left happily. He returned to his bedroom for his afternoon nap.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling uneasy. King Zhuangxiang did not invite Lu Buwei along, meaning that it was solely Xiang Shaolong's achievement.

Helplessly, he exchanged a few hypocritical words with Lu Buwei and left to look for Li Si.

Li Si has moved to a guest room beside the Crown Prince palace. The minute he saw Xiang Shaolong, he smiled sincerely and thanked An Gu profusely. He then led Xiang Shaolong into his small hall.

Xiang Shaolong could feel that he is no longer as downcast as before and was like a completely new and energised man. Happy for him, he exclaimed, "Brother Li must be having a good time here."

Li Si guffawed, "All thanks to Brother Xiang's recommendation. Compared to Premier's residence, it is as different as heaven and hell. If you want me to go back there, I will rather die."

From his words, Xiang Shaolong could guess that he has been discriminated against and thus, lived an unhappy existence in Premier Residence.

A pretty maid came up to them and served tea before retiring to the inner hall.

Xiang Shaolong noticed that she was a lively and alluring young lady and could not resist taking a few more glances.

Li Si mentioned in a low voice, "This is a welcome gift from Prince Zheng. Isn't she beautiful?"

Xiang Shaolong was feeling emotional. Xiao Pan used to violate ladies and was punished by his mother Zhao Ni. Now, he is giving them away.

But this kid is still quite obedient and treated Li Si well as he had requested. He even knew how to secure his loyalty by presenting him with a beauty. What a boy!

Xiang Shaolong had to know and asked, "What does Brother Li think of Prince Zheng?"

Li Si's expression is full of respect, describing, "The Crown Prince is full of ambitions, highly observant and possesses the ability to learn very quickly. In the future, he will be the one who will unite the world. I am lucky to serve a capable King and it is all thanks to Brother Xiang."

It is Xiang Shaolong's turn to respect Li Si.

He is confident that Xiao Pan will be Qin Shihuang as it says so in history. But Li Si is able to predict the same thing based on his intelligence. Therefore, Li Si had much greater foresight.

Li Si's eyes continued to shine with respect at Xiang Shaolong, stated, "When I was studying with Prince Zheng the day before, the King and Queen came to visit him. They told me about Brother Xiang's suggestion to unite the world. Externally, we can connect the walls of each state against the northern barbarians. Internally, we must have a common currency, set up provinces, open roads, build bridges, standardised the writing system and weights and

measurement. Such a brilliant and far-sighted vision! I respect you from the bottom of my heart.”

Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted. He could not imagine the words he carelessly sprouted would become teaching material for Xiao Pan. When Xiao Pan executes these ideas, wouldn't it be history reflecting history? What a mess!

After chatting further, Li Si asked Xiang Shaolong about Lu Buwei.

Xiang Shaolong told him the truth and Li Si assured, “Brother Xiang need not worry. From what I see, King Zhuangxiang is displeased with Lu Buwei's fighting and causing the combined armies to blockade the Pass. The traitor's honeymoon period is ending soon.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. Even with your intelligence, you cannot guess that King Zhuangxiang is dying soon. He sincerely advised, “Heaven's plans are unfathomable. No matter what happens in the future, Brother Li only needs to focus on assisting the Crown Prince. Do not bother yourself with other issues.”

Discontented, Li Si protested, “Who does Brother Xiang think I am? We are true friends and should share wealth and woe. In the future, do not speak like this.”

Xiang Shaolong was smiling bitterly when Xiao Pan summoned him.

Both men felt that their meeting was too brief but they cannot ignore the order of the Crown Prince.



Xiang Shaolong may have plenty of enemies but he has made some friends as well.

CHAPTER 2  
The Death Of Zhuangxiang  
[Translated by JUSTICE13]

XIAO PAN was standing at the window with his arms folded. Staring at the sun setting at the garden below, he does look imposing. After the attendant came in with Xiang Shaolong and withdrew, he plainly invited, "Grand Tutor, please come to my side!"

Xiang Shaolong felt that he is starting to resemble a proper Crown Prince. Moving to his side, he joined him in watching the sunset.

Xiao Pan turned and watched him briefly before he resumed his gaze, sighing softly.

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "Is something bothering Crown Prince?"

Xiao Pan revealed a bitter expression and sighed, "If I am bothered, no one should know better than Grand Tutor!"

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback.

This is the first time Xiao Pan is speaking to him in such an official manner. Xiang Shaolong can feel the distance widening between both of them. Emotional, he sighed as well.

After an unnatural minute of silence, Xiao Pan revealed, "Yesterday, Premier Lu told me something strange. He told me that in this world, there are only three persons who are really sincere to me. They are Father, Mother and himself. Among the three persons, only he can help me unite the whole world. He advised me not to trust anyone else. Anyone else besides the three of them are just stepping stones in helping me dominate the world. Ai! He really treats me like his own son and thought that I know it as well."

Turning around, he stared straight at Xiang Shaolong and asked in a low voice, "Master! Why did he say something like that? Is he against you? I don't even know when I'll be King but he seems to be treating me like the King already. Isn't it strange?"

Xiang Shaolong was feeling uncomfortable under his stare.

In the past, he will scold him for addressing himself as Master. But under his pressing gaze, he was lost for words. At the same time, from Lu Buwei's words, he can deduce that Lu Buwei is not on good terms with him, highlighting his sensitivity and intelligence.

Xiao Pan realised his slip and recomposed himself, questioning, "From Grand Tutor's expression, something unhappy must have happened between him and Premier Lu."

His mood darkening slightly, he added, "Does Grand Tutor still wishes to hide something from me?"

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly alarmed at another problem that Xiao Pan has brought up.

Although he knew that Xiao Pan will soon be King after King Zhuangxiang's death as stated in history but how would Lu Buwei know this as well? Thinking deeper, his heart pumped madly.

Xiao Pan was surprised and inquired, "Why is Grand Tutor's expression so grave looking?"

Xiang Shaolong was thinking furiously. Historians mentioned that King Zhuangxiang died of illness three years after ascending the throne. But this is not true.

King Zhuangxiang is poisoned to death by Lu Buwei. Otherwise, he will not say these strange things to Xiao Pan.

How can he watch by the side as Lu Buwei carried out his murder plan?

His heart is beating even faster than ever.

He is really dumb and blindly believed history books and movies. He should have predicted this possibility.

If he told everything to King Zhuangxiang honestly, how will he think?

From his intimate relationship with King Zhuangxiang and Zhu Ji, they will believe what he says. Will history be changed?

Xiang Shaolong hardened his heart and decide to ignore all the consequences and save King Zhuangxiang's life. Otherwise, he will be guilt-ridden.

At this very moment, an attendant ran in crying, "Crown Prince. The King has fainted at the rear pavilion."

Xiao Pan's countenance changed immediately.

Xiang Shaolong's limbs turned ice-cold. He knows that he is too late and cannot change the wheels of fortune.

Recalling the murderous look in Lu Buwei's eyes, he realised that it was meant for King Zhuangxiang.

He lost again. But it was due to him being blinded by historical records.

Eight Imperial Physicians are trying their best to save King Zhuangxiang throughout the night. Despite regaining consciousness, he has lost the ability to speak. The Physicians concluded that he had a stroke.

Only Xiang Shaolong can see the pain and hatred in his eyes.

With his pulse becoming weaker and his heart stopping twice, he still managed to summon his adrenaline and continue fighting the devil trying to claim his soul

When Lu Buwei came before him, his eyes glowed with anger and his lips shook, being unable to say what is on his mind.

Zhu Ji was crying her eyes out. Thanks to a palace maid supporting her, she managed to remain standing.

Lady Xiuli and Prince Cheng Chongqiao cried hard as well. Lady Xiuli even fainted and was carried out.

Xiao Pan stood at the bedside and held tightly to King Zhuangxiang's hands. Completely silent, he was amazingly composed.

Only Lu Buwei, Xiang Shaolong, Xu Xian, Lu Gong, Cai Ze, Du Bi and other important officials are allowed to enter his bedroom. The other officials are waiting for the latest news outside the palace.

King Zhuangxiang suddenly pulled Xiao Pan's hands away and pointed to Xiang Shaolong with much effort.

Lu Buwei's eyes shone with anger and faced Xiang Shaolong, exclaiming, "Your Majesty wishes to see you!"

He stood aside, leaving Xiao Pan alone by his bedside.

Xiang Shaolong was filled with regret and hatred. If he had thought of Lu Buwei's plot to kill King Zhuangxiang, he will

have exposed his scheme. Ultimately, he cannot win fate and lost by one stance.

He came to the bedside and kneeled down, grasping King Zhuangxiang's hand tightly.

Straining hard, King Zhuangxiang focused his dimming eyes on his face, sending out a mixture of emotions, including anger, pain and a plea for help.

Among all those present, only Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong would understand his meaning. Although he did not know how Lu Buwei got King Zhuangxiang to consume the poison, it is possible that he poisoned him personally due to their close relations.

Therefore, after regaining consciousness, King Zhuangxiang knew that it was Lu Buwei who poisoned him but is unable to say so because the poison has caused him to become dumb.

Lu Buwei's relative Mo Ao is truly a poisons expert. None of the Imperial Physician could detect the presence of poison.

Holding onto King Zhuangxiang's trembling hands, Xiang Shaolong could not stop his tears from coming out.

Even Xiao Pan who was expressionless all this while suddenly kneeled down and starting crying loudly.

The palace guards and maids were affected and began sobbing as well.

Xiang Shaolong could not bear to see him suffer in silence. He leaned forward and whispered so softly that only Xiao Pan can hear him, "Rest assured Your Majesty. I will kill Lu Buwei and avenge you."

Xiao Pan was terribly shaken but maintained his silence.

King Zhuangxiang's eyes flickered, revealing surprise, comfort and gratitude. The look quickly subsided as he closed his eyes and his head leaned to one side, without any strength left. He passed away like that.

The bedroom was filled with loud crying. Everyone from the palace maid to the high-ranking officials kneeled all over the floor.

In name, Xiao Pan is now the King of Qin.

By the time Xiang Shaolong got home to Wu Residence, it was deep into the night.

Teng Yi, Jing Jun and himself are not in their best mood.

Without King Zhuangxiang, Lu Buwei is unstoppable. Before Xiao Pan is twenty one and officially crowned King, Lu Buwei the Left Premier will dominate Qin politics.

Zhu Ji will become another influential person.

Unfortunately for her, she does not have her own organization and can only rely on Lu Buwei.

Supporting each other mutually, they form a powerful alliance.



To a certain degree, Xiang Shaolong knew that he is the reason Lu Buwei poisoned King Zhuangxiang.

As Li Si has observed, King Zhuangxiang and Lu Buwei's views are more and more divided. Adding fuel to fire is Wu Tingwei's betrayal. Lu Buwei is worried that Xiang Shaolong will report his plot to King Zhuangxiang and he will lose all his wealth, power, titles and men overnight. Also hoping for his own son to ascend the throne as soon as possible, he took the risk and carried out the poisoning.

Half of the Qin court is on his side.

His only lapse is that he will never imagine that Xiao Pan is not his real son.

The three men sat together in the main hall. Even though they are exhausted, they do not feel like sleeping.

Teng Yi asked in a deep voice, "Is Lu Buwei behind this?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded, "I am positive."

Jing Jun was young and impulsive. Jumping up, he cried, "I am going to tell everyone I know and see how he can still lie through his teeth."

But seeing the wooden expressions of his two elder brothers, he went back to his seat.

Teng Yi suggested, "Why don't we leave Xianyang City now? While the King has just passed away and Lu Buwei is busy with the state funeral, we leave Qin as far behind us as possible."

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. If not for Xiao Pan, he may do this. For the safety of the women and his men, he can put aside all his enmity. But right now, he just cannot leave.

Teng Yi advised, "It is never too late to take revenge. The opportunity to leave now is once in a lifetime. Lu Buwei hates you to the core. He just needs to find some lame excuse and he can annihilate us."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Can Second Brother leave first? And take everyone with you."

Teng Yi was horrified, "What else is there in Xianyang City that is worth Third Brother's attention?"

Jing Jun interceded, "Third Brother has to protect Empress Ji and Prince Zheng. I don't think Lu Buwei dare to attack us openly. If he attacks us in secret, we can still counter him."

Xiang Shaolong decided, "Little Jun, you get some rest first. I have something to discuss with Second Brother."

Jing Jun thought that he wanted to persuade Teng Yi on his own and left.

Xiang Shaolong was quiet for a long while.

Teng Yi sighed, "Shaolong! Seriously speaking, we are closer than real brothers. What is it that you cannot say to me? If you are not leaving, neither am I. If we must die, we will die together."

Xiang Shaolong hardened his heart and whispered, "Prince Zheng is actually Lady's Ni son."

Teng Yi was flabbergasted, "What!?"

Xiang Shaolong told him the whole story.

Teng Yi was upset, "Why didn't you tell me earlier? Are you afraid that I will betray you?"

Xiang Shaolong sincerely state, "Of course I trust you. Otherwise, I will not reveal it now. Actually this secret is a heavy responsibility. I only wish to carry it alone."

Teng Yi's face warmed up and offered, "Since this is the case, we shall remain in Xianyang City and face off with Lu Buwei. But we must prepare an exit strategy and leave if necessary. With our elite army, as long as it is not fighting the Qin army, we can still keep our lives."

Xiang Shaolong assured, "Little Jun is right. Lu Buwei dared not attack us openly. But hidden attacks are hard to detect. After King Zhuangxiang's funeral, we will retreat to the farms and observe accordingly. It may be eight years before Xiao Pan's coronation but he is still considered the King of Qin. His word is law. Even if Lu Buwei is daring, he will not ignore his instructions."

Teng Yi cautioned, "Do not underestimate him. This man has all the guts in the world and love to take risks. He alone has caused the death of two generations of Qin Kings. That shows how formidable he is. Moreover, he has unorthodox people helping him. Even if he does not attack us openly, we must still have watertight precautions."

Xiang Shaolong agreed, "Thanks for your pointers. I have been too complacent. Xiao Pan is still a child and let's hope Empress Ji do not give him up for Lu Buwei."

Teng Yi sighed, "That is my biggest worry."

Frantic footsteps can be heard approaching them.

Both men looked at each other and felt uneasy at the same time.

An elite warrior named Wu Jie who is based at the farm came running in. Prostrating on the floor, he wailed, "Master Wu has passed away!"

Like a bolt from the blue, both men were stunned.

Xiang Shaolong felt like he was floating in the air without a care in the world. For a moment, all his sorrows are forgotten.

In a split second, he understood why Lu Buwei invited them to Xianyang City for a banquet. Luring them away from the farms, he got Wu Tingwei the traitor to carry out his devious plan and gain control of the farms.

Luckily, Tao Fang rushed back in time. Otherwise, the news of Wu Yingyuan's death will not reach them so soon.

Jing Jun ran into the room and wondered what happened. After he was informed, his face was covered with hot tears. With an indignant face, he ran towards the main door.

Teng Yi barked, "Stand still!"

Jing Jun ran a few more steps before he fell onto the floor crying.

Teng Yi grabbed Wu Jie up from the floor and shake him, asking, "What did Master Tao say?"

Wu Jie added, "Master Tao ordered Master (Wu) Guo and Master (Pu) Bu to lead the family warriors and arrested Third Master, Fourth Master and Master Tingwei. He requested you three Masters to return to the farms at once."

Teng Yi released his hold and the exhausted Wu Jie collapsed back to the floor. Going to a crestfallen Xiang Shaolong, he grabbed him by the shoulders and reminded, "This is a life and death situation. If Third Brother cannot be decisive, the entire Wu Family will be annihilated."

Xiang Shaolong was at a loss, "What can I do? You want me to kill them?"

Teng Yi insisted, "That is right. If you don't kill them, they will kill you. These idiots actually believe Lu Buwei, thinking that Lu Buwei will not kill them to seal their mouths. If I am not mistaken, Lu Buwei's men are on their way to the farms right now. They will take advantage of the Wu family chaos to kill them once and for all."

To Jing Jun, he roared, "Little Jun! If we are not dead, there are many opportunities for you to cry in the future. Get out there now and keep watch for suspicious people. At the same time, prepare our horses."

Jing Jun jumped up and led the Eighteen Guardians, who had just come in, out of Wu Residence.

Xiang Shaolong sobered up and suppressed his grief. He asked their informant Wu Jie, "Did you come in from the city gate?"

Wu Jie answered, "Master Tao instructed me to climb over the city wall and avoid detection."

Teng Yi and Xiang Shaolong exchanged glances, impressed by Tao Fang steadiness in the face of danger.

Wu Jie added, "We have over a hundred men waiting for you three masters outside the city and we have prepared the best horses. Will the three masters please leave at once!"

In this instant, Wu Yanzhu frantically ran in shouting, "The situation looks bad. There are hundreds of men approaching us among the darkness in the South-western and Eastern-north direction."

Teng Yi ordered, "Set fire to the residence at once. This will attract people to save the fire and they will not dare to act rashly. This can also save the lives of the maids and servants."

Wu Yanzhu left to execute his order.

Teng Yi faced Xiang Shaolong and stated, "Has Third Brother made up his mind?"

Xiang Shaolong actually smiled, "I have no other choice. From today onwards, whoever tries to go against me will have a taste of their own medicine."

In this era where fighting decides the fate of everyone, it is the only solution.

Xiang Shaolong finally understood this reality.

Teng Yi nodded, "That's better. Are you ready to go?"

The sound of cackling fire is heard. The storeroom at the back garden has just caught fire.

The Wu Residence stood alone and away from the neighbouring houses. While the northern wind is strong, the fire will still not spread to the nearby buildings.

The air is filled with people shouting for help to save the fire.

The neighbours will not know about this fire so soon. Those shouting to save the fire are those who set the fire in the first place.

Xiang Shaolong regained his spirits and commanded, "Let's rush back now."

In this moment, he is officially against Lu Buwei.

Until now, Lu Buwei has been gaining the upper hand.

When is his nightmare going to end?

## CHAPTER 3

## Exposing The Plot

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

As everyone rode towards the city gates, the sky is beginning to brighten.

Xiang Shaolong just turned onto the road leading out of the city when he held his horse to a halt.

Teng Yi, Jing Jun, the Eighteen Guardians and Wu Jie, as well as some of the elite brothers hurriedly come to a stop as well.

The cold morning wind is blowing hard at their clothes.



The long road seems deserted but a killing aura can be felt in the air.

With the wind blowing and leaves falling, the trees on both sides rustled.

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly, "No matter what, I must fetch Yanran before I can leave in peace."

Teng Yi was dazed and frowned, "She is with Qin Qing and should be safe."

Xiang Shaolong insisted, "I understand but I still feel uneasy. Ai! I am sorry."

Teng Yi and Jing Jun looked at each other and both of them have a helpless look on their face. The trip back to the farms must not be delayed and cannot afford this additional time lapse.

Wu Jie suggested, "Master Xiang! Why don't you send someone to fetch her?"

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi exchanged glances, both feeling nervous about this. They were reminded about the time when they left for Wei and wanted to change their travelling path but was strongly objected by Lu Xiong.

The elite squad members have been through the toughest training. When their superiors are talking, they are taught never to interrupt. Why is this Wu Jie so courageous? Would Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi be so dim witted to require his advice?

Xiang Shaolong's suspicions are raised and he lied, "Shall Wu Jie and Master Jing fetch her on my behalf?"

Wu Jie was taken aback and protested, "That would be wrong! I still have to guide Master Xiang and Master Teng, Ao!"

Under Teng Yi's gestures, Wu Yanzhu and We Shu rode up from behind. Using their long swords, they held Wu Jie hostage.

Xiang Shaolong's eyes are shining coldly and laughed icily, "Wu Jie, do you know where you went wrong and exposed yourself?"

Wu Jie's countenance changed, "I did not! I am not a spy!"

The moment he said these words, he knew that he has let the cat out of the bag.

Knowing that Xiang Shaolong has a high standing in the Wu Family and is exceedingly farsighted. In front of him, Wu Jie was psychologically affected and gave his game away.

Jing Jun blew his top and barked, "Pull him down the horse!"  
Bang!

Wu Shu delivered a kick and sent Wu Jie falling down from his horse. Before he can stand up, Teng Yi jumped down his horse, held him up by his hair and punched him squarely in his abdomen.

Wu Jie was in so much pain his body curled up. Two of the Guardians held him up and forced him to stand straight.

Jing Jun came in front of him and drew out a dagger. Pressing it against his throat, he coldly promised, "One lie and this dagger will pierce your throat. I will only pierce a reasonable hole so that you will slowly bleed to death in about ten days."

Wu Jie's face turned as white as snow. Breaking down, he sobbed, "It is Young Master who forced me to do this. Ai! It is all my fault! I owe him a lot of money in the past."

Everyone was enlightened and thanked their lucky stars. If not for Xiang Shaolong wanting to fetch Ji Yanran, they would be ambushed and died a wrongful death.

What a devious plot!

Xiang Shaolong regained some hope and interrogated, "Is Master Wu really dead?"

Wu Jie shook his head, "That is a lie. Everything is the same at the farms. Young Master only wanted to get rid of you three. Otherwise, I will not do it. Ya!"

Wu Shu hit him at the waist with his knee.

Xiang Shaolong could feel his spirits rising and ordered, "This chap shall be handed to Second Brother to be further interrogated. Little Jun and I are going over to Qin Qing's residence. After we fetched Yanran, we will plan our next step."

After fixing a place to meet, he rode with Jing Jun towards Qin Qing's residence and was grateful for a narrow escape.

On the road, Xiang Shaolong felt like a brand new man.

If Lu Buwei's plots all came from this man called Mo Ao, then this man is the most clever and devious man who is also well-versed with psychological attacks.

If this plan succeeded, he will only outlive King Zhuangxiang by two days.

This is a chain plot.

First, Lu Buwei could not kill Xiang Shaolong at the red pine forest. He turned his attention to Wu Tingwei who indulges in wine and women. Using Lao Ai and a courtesan, he made use of his unhappiness with Xiang Shaolong and got him to switch sides.

To gain Lu Buwei's favour, he disclosed the Wu Family plans to leave. This traitor was then determined to eliminate Xiang Shaolong for good.

The plan to poison King Zhuangxiang should have been prepared much earlier in order to consolidate his power.

So Lu Buwei used the banquet to lure him to Xianyang City. After King Zhuangxiang's death, he will lure him out of the city and assassinate him on the roads.

Now that Qin is in chaos over King Zhuangxiang's death and Xiang Shaolong is the sworn-enemy of the six states, no one will be bothered if he is killed.

The lie about Wu Yingyuan's death, chaos in the farm is not without loopholes.

From Wu Jie's words, Tao Fang seems to be overrated. But King Zhuangxiang has just been poisoned to death. Already mentally unsettled, they will not be surprised if Lu Buwei poisoned Wu Yingyuan as well.

In reality, Wu Tingwei may be useless but he is only anti-Xiang Shaolong and not so heartless to take his own father's life.

With the potential threat of enemies attacking the farms, they do not have much time to think things over but to hastily rush back to the farm. This way, they will fall straight into Lu Buwei's well-thought trap.

If not for Xiang Shaolong's love for Ji Yanran, they will die without even knowing why.

Xiang Shaolong let out a long breath and gathered his courage. Whipping his horse, he and Jing Jun rode along the wide roads of Xianyang City towards Qin Qing's residence.

In white mourning clothes, Qin Qing received the two men in her main hall.

Without makeup, her original and enchanting beauty overwhelmed them. They dared not look straight at her but could not resist feasting their eyes on her appearance.

Jing Jun was completely awe-struck. When he was served tea by a maid, he held the cup foolishly in the hand and did not even take a few sips.

Qin Qing calmly asked, "Grand Tutor Xiang came here so early in the morning. Is there something urgent?"

Xiang Shaolong can sense the displeasure in her tone. He apologised, "It is nothing urgent. We wish to fetch Yanran back to the farms!"

Finished, he felt that his reason lacked strength. It was decided earlier than Yanran would stay for a few days but they are fetching her before three days has passed. In such a hurried fashion and so early in the morning, it is considered a rude gesture.

Qin Qing instructed someone to notify Ji Yanran and furrowed her long eyelashes in deep thought.

Xiang Shaolong sipped the hot tea and looked around him.

The hall was simply decorated without a hint of luxury. Its humbleness reflects the class and taste of its female owner.

Qin Qing plainly stated, "For Grand Tutor Xiang to change his mind so suddenly, don't you think you owe me a proper explanation?"

Xiang Shaolong was feeling troubled and remained silent.

He could not bear to lie to her.

Qin Qing softly sighed, "Don't feel bad. At least you will not tell lies like others. If you leave like this with the recent death of His Majesty, you will invite rumours and gossips."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "I will come back shortly. Ai! There are many things in the world that is beyond our control."

Qin Qing repeated 'Beyond our control' a few times. She suddenly asked in a soft voice, "Does Grand Tutor Xiang think that His Majesty's death is rather unexpected?"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned that she has suspicions regarding King Zhuangxiang's death. He is committed to mislead her or she will be harmed by Lu Buwei and frantically replied, "The Imperial Physicians will know what is going on."

Qin Qing raised her petite face and eyed him with suspicion and coldly state, "I wish to know your personal thoughts."

This is the first time Xiang Shaolong is looking into her eyes without any reservations. Trying his best to suppress the guilt in his eyes, he sighed, "My brain is in a mess and I have not thought about that."

Qin Qing's eyes bore straight at him and continued her icy dialogue, "In that case, what did Grand Tutor Xiang say into His Majesty's ears that caused him to put his mind at ease and die in peace. Only Prince Zheng heard what you said but he is unwilling to tell me and Empress Ji."

Xiang Shaolong's limbs turned ice-cold, recognizing that he has committed a serious error.

The words he said were right but the problem is he did not fix a lie with Xiao Pan.

If someone questions and they said different things, it will show that one of them is lying.

He was only concerned about Lu Buwei and whispered to King Zhuangxiang. He forgot that on the other side of the bed, there were Zhu Ji, Lady Xiuli and a bunch of palace maids. Sooner or later, Lu Buwei may know about this as well.

Thanks to Qin Qing's reminder, he can try to salvage this via Li Si.

Qin Qing saw that his face is changing colour. When she was about to question further, Ji Yanran came in.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly stood up and sighed, "Grand Tutor Qin's life has always been peaceful and does not meddle in worldly affairs. I do not wish to see Grand Tutor embroiled in complicated affair."

Leading Ji Yanran, he bade farewell and left.

Staring at Xiang Shaolong, Qin Qing's eyes revealed mixed feelings. Except arranging to meet up with Ji Yanran in the future, she did not say anything more to Xiang Shaolong. However, Xiang Shaolong could feel that she is beginning to understand him better.

When they met up with Teng Yi, Ji Yanran has been updated about everything that has happened.

The traitor Wu Jie is riding a horse but his legs are tied to the harness. Unless one looks carefully, he looks like any other horseman.

Everyone rode out of the city towards the farms.



Entering a dense forest, they stopped.

Jing Jun tied Wu Jie to a tree and instructed the Eighteen Guardians to keep watch.

Teng Yi's expression grows serious and detailed, "The people ambushing us are led by Lu Buwei's top guy Guan Zhongxie. Although with only a hundred and fifty warriors, they are the best fighters from Premier Residence. Master Tu did not even know about this at all. It appears to me that the balance of power is slowly shifting to Mo Ao and Guan Zhongxie."

Xiang Shaolong enquired, "Where are they planning to ambush us?"

Teng Yi pointed to a nearby valley named Plum Valley and state, "Of course they chose a place that is hard for us to escape. Based on our present strength, fighting them is like throwing an egg against a stone. A bigger issue is that Wu Jie has revealed our secrets to Lu Buwei."

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly. So Lu Buwei has identified Wu Tingwei as their weakest link a long time ago. Since they have no idea about his treachery, they are always one step slower than him.

Ji Yanran simply countered, "We need not panic yet. I am sure Brother-in-law and Wu Jie have limited knowledge about our real strength."

Xiang Shaolong agreed that it was a close shave. While raising this army of five thousand elite warriors, he included

the classification of secrets as well from his 21st century military training. Except for them, the core leaders of the elite army, their subordinates only react to orders. Any one of them alone will not have complete information about army strength, fighting prowess, armour and weapons. They will know things on a need to know basis. To further limit information outflow, they are strictly prohibited from discussing their training. As a result, Wu Jie's knowledge is limited.

Teng Yi nodded, "It is fortunate that we have precautions in place. But Lu Buwei will be extra wary of us. Hng! What shall we do now?"

Ji Yanran implored, "Where is Brother-in-law now?"

Teng Yi replied, "Of course he is back at the farm waiting for good news and to avoid suspicions at the same time. Guan Zhongxie will naturally kill Wu Jie. Dead men tell no tales."

Ji Yanran proposed, "That's great. We will return to the farm now and force Brother-in-law and Wu Jie to verify each other's words. We must find out if there are any other traitors in the family. After we have solved our internal problem, we will fight to the end with Lu Buwei. Worse come to worse, we simply die! We must take revenge for Princess Qian and those who died for us."

Xiang Shaolong was agonized. Lu Buwei will enjoy at least another eight years of power and he does not know his own ending as it is not stated in history. The weather for the future looks gloomy indeed.

He nodded, "We will let Guan Zhongxie live a while longer. Let's return to the farms!"

Silent all these while, Jing Jun signalled and summoned the Eighteen Guardians. Together with Wu Jie, they took a left detour back towards the farms.

As the travelling distance is much longer, they are still twenty miles from the farms at nightfall.

As everyone was preparing to pitch their tents, Xiang Shaolong sounded, "Wait! Master Tu mentioned that Guan Zhongxie is both clever and highly-skilled. We took so much time to leave the city and will raise his suspicions. He will send spies and they will soon find out that we have changed our travelling path. It is better to play safe. Even if we have overestimated him, it is still better than to lose our lives."

Jing Jun jumped up excitedly, "If he attacks us during the night, I will let them taste their own medicine."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "My sentiments exactly."

The campsite was situated beside a small river.

Five tents are surrounding a weak fire and there are straw men asleep in the tents and standing guard. It looks just as real unless one looks closely.

Hiding in a dense forest uphill, their bows and arrows are prepared to give any invaders a surprise.

However, there is no activity even till late into the night.

Last night, they did not sleep at all and travelled the entire day. Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi could not hold back and started yawning.

Ji Yanran suggested, "Why don't we take turns to sleep or we will all die of tiredness."

When Xiang Shaolong woke up, he found Ji Yanran still in deep slumber in his arms. The sun is shining strongly and the birds are chirping, heralding Spring.

He could feel tranquillity in his soul as he scrutinized the well-proportioned Ji Yanran sleeping.

Now that he is far away from Xianyang City, he is enjoying the fresh air and the love of this beauty whose body is being illuminated by the sun. All of a sudden, his tense emotions and burdened mind feels like they have been relieved and freed.

Like a Buddha who has gained enlightenment, he realised one thing. The reason why he is on the losing end is because Lu Buwei has been planning against him right from the start and he is burdened by his knowledge that Lu Buwei will remain unchallenged for eight years.

If he continues to remain passive, he will be at the losing end.

He may not be able to kill Lu Buwei in the coming eight years, but history has proven that he will be defeated by Xiao Pan, Li Si, Wang Jian, etc.

In other words, there is no way these people will come to harm.

Since this is the case, why doesn't he borrow their strength and fight till the end with Lu Buwei. King Zhuangxiang's death has proven that no one can change history.

Even if he died, Xiao Pan will avenge him when he is crowned King on his twenty first birthday.

Thinking about this, he completely relaxed.

Teng Yi's voice rang out behind him, "Third Brother is awake!"

Xiang Shaolong tried to move Ji Yanran.

The beauty hummed and woke up. Shyly, she crawled up from Xiang Shaolong bosom and sat to the side. Still dazed from her sleep, she asked, "Guan Zhongxie is not here yet?"

Her lazy yet enchanting posture caused both men to stare blankly at her.

Ji Yanran shot them a dirty look and yelled, "I am going to wash up by the river!"

She was about to take a step when Xiang Shaolong stopped her, warning, "The smart Guan Zhongxie may have seen through our trap. Moreover, the campsite is near the river and it is easy to flee. If I am him, I will move my ambush further down the road or I will wait at the campsite until daybreak. If Yanran goes like this, you will fall into their trap."

Teng Yi came to his side and scrutinized him. Fascinated, he exclaimed, "Third Brother seems like a brand new man. Since the last mission, I have never seen you so full of confidence, fighting spirit and alertness."

Ji Yanran happily added, "Second Brother is right. This is the hero Yanran loves."

Xiang Shaolong knew what they meant. Since untying the dead knot in his heart, he has regained his ambition and heroic air. Summoning Jing Jun and the Eighteen Guardians, he told them his theory.

Jing Jun nodded, "This is easy. We, the Jing village hunters, spend long hours in the wild tracking animals. As long as Guan Zhongxie has his men come near the campsite, even if they just rode one round, we will be able to detect their existence."

Under his command, the six hunters from the Eighteen Guardians left with him.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi further interrogated Wu Jie about Wu Tingwei and discovered that Lao Ai was involved as they suspected.

After they prepared breakfast, the two men went to another side of the slope and admired the beautiful scenery. As they ate their food, Teng Yi sighed, "It is not as bad as we thought. From Wu Jie's confession. Only Wu Tingwei has betrayed us."

Ji Yanran sighed, "He is Tingfang's elder brother. What can we do to him?"

Xiang Shaolong coldly snorted, "There is no more relationships to talk about. If we don't kill him, we will send him outside the central plains and let Big Brother imprison him there. He will never step into Qin for eternity."

Teng Yi was pleased, "Second Brother has regained the composure you had as Dong Horse Fanatic in Handan City."

Jing Jun was seen hurrying back. Full of respect, he reported, "Third Brother has excellent foresight. Two miles away from the camp, we discovered horse dropping and signs of grass that has been eaten by horses. Following the trail, we detected that the enemy has relocated the ambush further up north."

Teng Yi was astonished, "He knows the place well. That is a path we must use to get home. Unless we turn back and use another route, we will have to climb over the mountains."

Xiang Shaolong stared at the river below and concluded, "He will leave some men to continue spying on us. In this wilderness, he can do whatever he wants. The men he left behind should already be more than enough to eliminate us."

Ji Yanran mused, "This Guan Zhongxie is so clever. He will leave some men behind as hubby had guessed. Thus, even if we slip away, they can still pursue us."

Jing Jun showed the fearless side of him and cursed, "If they have split into two groups to attack us simultaneously from the front and the back, we can use this against them and attack them separately."

Teng Yi dismissed, "You are young and reckless, only knowing how to fight. If the enemy surrounds us, how can we escape?"

Jing Jun was dumbfounded.

Xiang Shaolong lied down and stared at the tree branches and clouds above him. He leisurely mentioned, "Let's have a good sleep first. When the enemy is confused over whether we have left last night or this morning, it will be time to go home."

Everyone gazed at him with surprise, wondering how he plans to get out of this tight situation.



## CHAPTER 4

## Love And Hatred

[Translated by JEAN]

ON a hill three miles South west from where they are, sounds of men talking and horses neighing can be heard. It appears that the enemies have lost their patience and thought that they have left for the farm long ago.

Up till now, not only did both parties have not exchanged blows, they haven't even seen each other's shadow. But this intangible battle been fought by both parties competing in intelligence, training, patience, strength and strategy. A

small error could cause Xiang Shaolong's smaller forces to be entirely wiped out.

Relying on the darkness and fog, Jing Jun and his hunters made sure that they were no spies nearby before pushing three rafts into the river. Securing them with rope, he hid the rafts among the reeds. Once accomplished, they returned to Xiang Shaolong's side and inquired, "What do we do next?"

Regaining his cool and determination as a top elite special forces commando, Xiang Shaolong replied, "It depends on the enemies' movement. Unless I am wrong, the men who were left behind will continue searching this area to confirm that we are not in hiding. Once confirmed, they will contact those men who have moved further down the road. That will be the time to retaliate."

Teng Yi nodded, "This is a brilliant move. Once the enemy suffers an ambush, they will retreat back to the path and seal our escape route. At the same time, they will use a flare to inform those men ahead of us. This way, they will surround us from the front and the back. That will be the best time we will use the rafts and leave this area quickly."

Ji Yanran praised, "Fantastic! Even if Sun Wu is here, he may not be able to think of such an excellent plan."

Xiang Shaolong can feel his confidence and fighting will improve by leaps and bounds. Under his strict commands, Jing Jun and the Eighteen Guardians divide themselves into

groups of threes and fours. Taking up advantageous spots around the campsite, they held their bows ready.

They may be smaller in numbers but every one of them is well-versed in night combat as well as jungle warfare. Their killing ability is not to be taken lightly.

Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and Ji Yanran hid themselves behind some rocks near the hilltop. Their mind at ease, they await the enemies' appearance.

The new moon rises up slowly to take its place in the sky, surrounded by countless stars. As the fog begins to disperse, the enemies came into view.

They formed ten odd units and are conducting a search slowly along the river.

Opposite the river are another seventeen or eighteen men in three groups. They are the first to enter the firing range of Jing Jun and his three fellow hunters.

Xiang Shaolong and his two companions could sense ten odd men approaching their hiding place. The atmosphere was as tense as a drawn bowstring.

They held their breaths and continue to wait patiently.

As planned, one of their men deliberately provoked a warhorse hidden in the forest. The horse reacts with a loud neighing sound, breaking the silence of the forest.

The enemies begin to move quickly towards the sound of the neighing.

A series of tragic shouts can be heard. Needless to say, the enemies have fallen into animal traps set up by Jing Jun and the hunters. With sharp wooden stakes at the bottom of the pit, a number of men were killed or heavily injured.

Xiang Shaolong and his men knew that it is time. First, they shot out their burning fireballs all around the enemies. It was followed by an endless volley of arrows.

Under the glow of the fire, the attackers were caught unaware and descended into chaos. Cries of help and sound of people falling filled the air. It was a pathetic sight.

The most formidable was of course Teng Yi. Arrows left his bow continuously with rest. The moment an enemy was sighted, his arrow will fly and embed itself in the enemy's body as if it can see.

Since they were hiding in several spots along the river, arrows were shot from different directions and the enemy could not find a safe hiding place at all.

In a short span of time, over ten enemies have been shot dead. Those surviving whistled urgently to retreat and they withdrew in panic.

A flare shot up the sky and exploded into silvery white sparks.

Xiang Shaolong charged downhill and trailed the retreating enemies, striking those in his reach. After he struck down seven or eight men, he returned to the forest. Everyone

collected their horses, retrieved Wu Jie, boarded their three rafts and floated downstream.

Finally, they vented some of their suppressed anger.

In the main hall of the Wu Family Farm, like a defeated man, Wu Tingwei and Wu Jie kneeled down in front of an incensed Wu Yingyuan.

Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi, Jing Jun, Wu Guo, Pu Bu, Liu Chao and Tao Fang stood on both sides, staring icily at the two Wu family traitors.

Wu Tingwei continued to protest, "I am only thinking about the family. How can we hope to defeat Premier Lu?"

Wu Yingyuan furiously cursed, "To think that I have been successful all my life and yet give birth to a nitwit and unfilial son. If Lu Buwei manages to kill Shaolong, he will kill you next to seal your mouth. Tell me! Did anyone from Premier Residence arrange to meet you after the ambush?"

Wu Tingwei was taken aback, proving that there is indeed such an arrangement.

He may not be the brightest person around but will still understand a simple philosophy called dead men tell no tales.

Beside him, Wu Jie was shaking with fear, knowing that the house rules are extremely strict.

Wu Yingyuan sighed, "I do what I say. Not only have you disobeyed my order, you are worse than a beast. Men! Bring these two men out to be executed immediately."

Wu Tingwei collapsed and shook with fear, exclaiming, "Father, I am wrong."

Four family warriors came to their sides and restrained them.

Xiang Shaolong interceded, "Father-in-law, please listen to me. Why don't we send him to the north and help Big Brother? This way, he can accumulate merits to compensate for his mistakes."

Wu Yingyuan slowly sighed, "I understand your concern. But this concerns the survival of the whole family. If because he is my own son and I am lenient, the authority of our Wu Family house rules will be gone. Everyone will not submit and the other family elders will think that I practise favouritism. Originally, I have three sons but I'll take it that I only have two sons. Come! Bring them to the ancestral hall and invite all the family heads to witness. I want everyone to know that family traitors will share the same punishment."

Wu Tingwei realised that his father is not trying to frighten him. His legs turning soft like mud, he begged for mercy.

Xiang Shaolong wanted to say something else.

Wu Yingyuan coldly decided, "I have made up my mind and nothing will change it. I have no hesitation in sacrificing a son and gaining everyone's cooperation."

Everyone was dumbfounded as Wu Tingwei and Wu Jie were dragged out.

Wu Yingyuan is right. His insistence in executing Wu Tingwei has everyone in shock. Nobody else within the family will dare to oppose him in fighting Lu Buwei to the end.

Even such an elaborate plot has failed to take Xiang Shaolong's life, giving hope and confidence to everyone.

The power and prestige of the Wu Family in Xianyang is no longer despised by the Qin population like before.

With the army favouring Xiang Shaolong, including Lu Buwei's general Meng Ao, they are in a much stronger position than before.

Since this plan has failed, Lu Buwei will naturally hatch another plot.

But Wu Tingwei's death has created some problems as well.

His mother Madam Wu and Wu Tingfang became very sick around the same time. Amazingly, Wu Yingyuan is surprising strong-willed and handled the daily affairs as per normal. He summoned his two sons who are doing business and sent them to the north to open up farmlands, focusing on expanding their influence there.

This has been approved by King Zhuangxiang and even Lu Buwei cannot interfere.

Xiang Shaolong busied himself with the training of his army and spent two months in peace and harmony. Today, Tao Fang showed up with the latest news from Xianyang City.

Listening to his report are Wu Yingyuan, Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi, Jing Jun and Wu Yingyuan's two brothers Wu Yingjie and Wu Yingen.

Tao Fang started, "According to Qin customs, after three and a half months since his death, King Zhuangxiang's funeral will be held at the Royal Temple. Every state has sent a representative to pay their respects. Tian Dan is representing Qi; I wonder what he is up to."

Xiang Shaolong was aroused, "For Tian Dan to come personally, he must be up to something. I am not surprised that Qi sent someone as they did not join the combined army fighting Qin six months ago. But aren't the five states still at war with Qin? Why did they send representatives as well?"

Tao Fang explained, "Prince Xinling's military seal has been confiscated and is spending his time aimlessly in Daliang. The four armies retreated one after another and made truce with Lu Buwei. Every state is afraid of Qin attacking them and are busy presenting gifts and bribes. Xianyang City will be the centre of attention once again."

Xiang Shaolong thought that Lord Longyang will definitely represent Wei but who will the other states send? He hates to see people like Li Yuan and Guo Kai again.

Wu Yingyuan questioned, "Anything from Lu Buwei?"



Tao Fang shrugged his shoulders, "I believe he is too busy to pay attention to us. With the change of power, the most important task is to consolidate the country's authority. I heard that he made several changes to the high-ranking officials and generals with the support of Empress Ji. He did not touch Xu Xian's or Wang Ling's men as the official posts that they are occupying are irrelevant."

Wu Yingen mused, "He will carry out his plot step by step."

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Teng Yi faced Xiang Shaolong and enquired, "If we can disrupt the relationship between Lu Buwei and Empress Ji, it will be as good as cutting of one of his limbs. What does Third Brother think?"

Everyone was eyeing him with high expectations. Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed and replied, "I will proceed accordingly."

Tao Fang suggested, "Shaolong should make a quick trip to Xianyang City. Empress Ji has tried to summon you three times but I have rejected them, saying that you are unwell. I don't think it is good to ignore her too many times."

Xiang Shaolong brightened up and resolved, "I will return to Xianyang City tomorrow."

Everyone cheered.

Xiang Shaolong was daydreaming about meeting Empress Ji.

Now that King Zhuangxiang is dead and if Zhu Ji wanted to get close to him, what shall he do?

He has the deepest respect for King Zhuangxiang and should not be getting close to his widow.

It is evening time. The clouds in the sky begin to sink and the moisture in the air begins to rise. When they meet, they accumulate and form a thick fog.

Xiang Shaolong was daydreaming about meeting Empress Ji.

Now that King Zhuangxiang is dead and if Zhu Ji wanted to get close to him, what shall he do?

He has the deepest respect for King Zhuangxiang and should not be getting close to his widow. This is something unacceptable.

Back at the Hidden Dragon Abode, Ji Yanran is chatting with Wu Tingfang in private. Wu Tingfang is still sick and bedridden.

With his own brother executed according to the family rules, this beauty's face is dead white and she is so thin until her cheeks have sunk into her face. Xiang Shaolong was grieved.

Ji Yanran saw him coming and stood up, advising, "Have a good chat with Tingfang!" Winking at him, she left the bedroom.

Xiang Shaolong understood that Tingfang hates her own brother for betraying the family and her father for being

heartless. With conflicting emotions affecting her mentally, she fell sick.

Sighing to himself, he sat at her bedside and lightly caressed her shoulder. He noticed a bowl in her hand that is still full of medicine and softly asked, "Not taking your medicine again?"

Wu Tingfang's eyes reddened and she lowered her head, sobbing silently.

No one knows her spoilt temper better than Xiang Shaolong. Once she throws a tantrum, no one can calm her down. Bending down to her ear, he whispered, "You are angry at father; but the real culprit is Lu Buwei. Everybody else is innocent. If you take it personally, not only will you remain sick, your mum will also be in bad health. Your father and I will be anxious about the two of you and cannot focus on fighting our real enemies. Do you understand?"

Wu Tingfang thought about it and nodded her head obediently.

Xiang Shaolong wiped away her tears and took this chance to feed her the bowl of medicine, coaxing, "That's my girl. You must get well soon and visit your mum."

Wu Tingfang protested, "The medicine is very bitter!"

Xiang Shaolong kissed her face and covered her with a blanket. He waited until she fell asleep and returned to the hall.

Zhao Zhi, Ji Yanran and the Tian sisters are playing with baby Bao'er. If Wu Tingfang is there as well, it would be perfect.

He received Bao'er from Ji Yanran and watched the sweet smile on his face. His heart swelled up with a strong will.

Lu Buwei can harm him and he can harm Lu Buwei as well.

The first man he must kill is not Lu Buwei but the devious and clever Mo Ao.

For every day he lives, one day, he will come up with a plot that will finally take Xiang Shaolong's life.

Wu Tingfang's health improved greatly. By the third day, she is strong enough to leave her bed and visit her mother.

She has become a quieter person and does not like to talk much or meet people outside the family. However, her eyes are glowing with never-seen-before determination. It seems that Xiang Shaolong's words have untied the knot in her heart, making her shift her hatred to Lu Buwei.

Now that she has recovered, Xiang Shaolong could finally put his mind at rest. With Teng Yi and Jing Jun, they left for Xianyang City.

The Eighteen Guardians have been increased to Eighty Guardians, increasing their might.

With everyone alert and travelling non-stop, they reached Xianyang City within a day.

Xiang Shaolong entered the palace and sought an audience with Empress Zhu Ji and the soon-to-be-king Xiao Pan.

Zhu Ji has lost considerable weight but Xiao Pan is looking great and energetic, contrasting the mourning clothes that don him.

They were overjoyed to see him. Dismissing their men, Zhu Ji went straight to the point, "Shaolong, what's up with you? Out of the blue, you slipped back to the farm and I cannot even find someone to talk to."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly stunned. With her husband dead, Zhu Ji is like a phoenix that has been set free. Nothing can hold her down anymore. He paid his obeisance to them, took his seat and answered, "Please excuse me, Empress. I have my own troubles as well."

Xiao Pan lowered his head, understanding what he meant.

Zhu Ji demanded, "Tell me about it or I will not let you leave."

From her tone, she did not treat him like a subordinate but as a friend.

Xiao Pan interceded, "Mother, please spare Grand Tutor Xiang. If he can say it, he would have done so."

Zhu Ji exclaimed, "The two of you are ganging up against me?"

Xiao Pan winked warmly at Xiang Shaolong, stating, "I take my leave. Mother should have a good chat with Grand Tutor Xiang!"

Looking at him leaving, Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to pull him back. His biggest fear now is to be alone with Zhu Ji.

When they were alone, Zhu Ji became quiet instead. After some time, she lightly sighed, "Is there some differences between you and Buwei?"

Xiang Shaolong kept quiet.

Zhu Ji scrutinized him for a while and slowly revealed, "When you returned from your last mission, I can tell that you have lost your bearings and seemed to have become a different person. Buwei has a funny look in his eyes when he looks at you. I know him too well. To achieve success, he will resort to all means. Isn't it obvious when he presented me to Zhuangxiang? He told me he will never leave me in the morning and by night I am with another man. "

She suddenly asked, "Will Shaolong blame me for not differentiating between good and evil?"

Only Xiang Shaolong will understand these words.

Zhu Ji, Xiao Pan and Lu Buwei's fate are intertwined together.

Lu Buwei need Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan to continue his hold of power and run the country legitimately. Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan needs Lu Buwei to manage the opposing court officials.

With rumours that Xiao Pan is Lu Buwei's son and if Zhu Ji eliminates Lu Buwei, they will be in danger. Without Lu Buwei, before Xiao Pan can be crowned King, they may be toppled down already.

Xiang Shaolong bowed, "How can I blame Empress?"

With an agonized smile, Zhu Ji softly reminded, "Remember the day when we left the Wu Family Fortress in Handan City? I promised Grandmaster Wu that as long as I am alive, Wu family will live in prosperity. I have never forgotten my promise; Shaolong can rest easy."

Xiang Shaolong was touched that Zhu Ji remembered her promise in times like this and was lost for words.

Zhu Ji brightened up and added, "Two days ago, Xu Xian, Lu Gong and Wang Ling proposed that you be promoted as the Imperial Cavalry Commander, leading ten thousand cavalry and securing the safety of Xianyang City. Lu Buwei objected strongly to their proposal. I did not know how would you feel and did not insist. I am surprised that the three most powerful men in the military are supporting you. Shaolong! You must not hide anymore. Little Zheng and I need you by our side!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned. Does Xu Xian and the rest know that he is opposing Lu Buwei?

Zhu Ji wailed, "You! Aren't you concerned about the Wu family's safety?"

Xiang Shaolong knew what she meant.

If she must choose between Lu Buwei and himself, she will choose him.

If he can replace Lu Buwei and protect her and Xiao Pan, then Lu Buwei will be unnecessary.

Hatefully, he knew that Lu Buwei will not be easily toppled. It is all recorded in history.

He nodded his head vigorously, "Thanks for Empress's concern!"

Zhu Ji's face reddened and she lowered her head, commenting, "As long as you do not treat me like an outsider, I will be satisfied."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "I have never considered you as an outsider. But the King has treated me well, how can I... Ai!"

Zhu Ji's eyes shone with anger, sighing, "How can I forget his love too? Shaolong spoke to him before he passed away. I think I can guess what it is. But please do not tell me because I do not want to know it now. I hope Shaolong can take pity on me and my unfavourable circumstances."

Xiang Shaolong discovers that Zhu Ji is cleverer than he expected. Reminded about Lao Ai, he wonders if he should challenge fate and warn her beforehand. The attendant at the gate suddenly reports, "Right Premier Lu Buwei is here to seek an audience with Empress."

Xiang Shaolong wished he could disappear into thin air. Of all people, he has to run into his arch enemy today.



## CHAPTER 5

## Grand Preparations

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

DRESSED flamboyantly in his official robes, Lu Buwei strode in arrogantly into Zhu Ji's Hall of Kindness. Xiang Shaolong hurriedly got up and greeted him.

Even livelier than before, he scanned Xiang Shaolong and nodded with a smile, "I am so happy to see you again."

A simple sentence that hints strongly at many things! It hints at Xiang Shaolong's sudden disappearance, his 'disregard' of the Qin court and the fact that he is able to stay alive!

He continued to pay his respects to Zhu Ji but did not kneel down, showing the special relationship he shares with her. With her support, he does not see himself as a subordinate any more.

Lu Buwei sat opposite Xiang Shaolong and smiled, "With shameless individuals coming in with evil intentions and creating trouble, these are trying times for the Qin Court. If Shaolong has nothing urgent, why don't you stay in Xianyang City? I may have some tasks for you."

Xiang Shaolong nodded in consent but secretly admired Lu Buwei's psychological warfare. Using the present danger as an excuse, he forced Zhu Ji to cooperate with him.

Turning to Zhu Ji, Lu Buwei asked, "What are Empress and Shaolong talking about?"

A simple sentence like this betrayed Lu Buwei's proud attitude. After all, he is a subject of Empress Ji and who is he to question Empress Ji about her affairs?

Zhu Ji was not angry and plainly state, "I am just asking about his recent activities!"

Anger flashed his eyes as Lu Buwei coldly dismissed, "Shaolong, please leave us alone. I have something important to discuss with Empress."

Xiang Shaolong was annoyed at his comment, indicating that he is not fit to join in their discussion.

He was about to take his leave when Zhu Ji interrupted, “Shaolong, hold your step. How can Premier Lu treat Shaolong like an outsider?”

Lu Buwei was shocked but put on a smile, “It is not that. He has no interests in court affairs and I do not want to burden him!”

Zhu Ji nonchalantly asked, “Premier Lu is so impatient; what can be so important?”

Xiang Shaolong and Lu Buwei knew that Zhu Ji is throwing her temper and is obviously siding with Xiang Shaolong. Lu Buwei will not be so foolish to continue rebutting her and went along, smiling, “Empress, please do not take offence. I wanted to see you as I have an excellent recommendation for the Imperial Cavalry Commander.”

The Imperial Cavalry Commander is the next post after An Gu to work closely with the royal family.

Xianyang City is protected by three armies. They are the palace guards protecting the palace and the Imperial Infantry and Imperial Cavalry defending the city. The Imperial Infantry are foot soldiers and Imperial Cavalry are soldiers on horseback.

If you combine both Imperial Infantry and Imperial Cavalry, it will be the same as Xiang Shaolong’s City Commander back at Handan City. It is just a separation of armies.

There are thirty thousand foot soldiers, three times more than the cavalry. But if you compare the honour and rank,

the Imperial Cavalry Commander is more prestigious than the Imperial Infantry Commander.

Zhu Ji coldly concluded, "Premier Lu need not recommend anyone. I have decided to promote Shaolong to be the Imperial Cavalry Commander. Except for him, there is nobody else I will trust."

Lu Buwei could not imagine the normally-obedient Zhu Ji decided on this matter and did not offer any room for discussion. His face changing colour slightly, he glanced at Xiang Shaolong with surprise and checked, "Shaolong has changed your mind?"

Xiang Shaolong understood where Zhu Ji is coming from and she is indeed formidable. She did not want to live in Lu Buwei's shadow forever. Now that Xiang Shaolong has gained the respect of the army and is the Imperial Cavalry Commander, he can check Lu Buwei's influence. Thus, Lu Buwei dare not act hastily and disregard her and Xiao Pan. Through Xiang Shaolong, she need not always bend her will and support Lu Buwei blindly.

Xiang Shaolong knew that Lu Buwei is pretending to be concerned but is actually forcing him to give up this promotion. Then he can recommend the person he has in mind. Xiang Shaolong smiled, "As Premier Lu mentioned, it is trying times for Qin. I can only put my personal responsibilities and accept this challenging position."

Anger shooting out of his eyes, Lu Buwei faked a smile and coughed, "Good. Since Empress thinks so highly of you, do not disappoint her!"

Zhu Ji plainly asked, "Does Premier Lu have anything else to say?"

Lu Buwei was infuriated but dare not argue with her, knowing that he has crossed the line earlier. He reported, "Qi Chancellor Tian Dan, Chu Imperial Uncle Li Yuan, Zhao General Pang Junyu arrived in Xianyang City yesterday. They hope to meet Empress and Crown Prince before attending the late king's funeral."

Zhu Ji coldly hissed, "We are still dressed in mourning clothes. What is there to see? Wait till the late king is buried first!"

This is the first time Lu Buwei is being admonished by Zhu Ji in such a manner and knew that it was due to Xiang Shaolong. He hid his feelings well and did not reveal any discontentment. After exchanging a few more words with Zhu Ji, he left.

The Hall of Kindness is completely noiseless.

After a long while, Zhu Ji sighed, "I have secretly ordered everyone who saw you speaking to King Zhuangxiang to keep it a secret. Violators will be sentenced to death. Buwei should be ignorant about this matter."

Xiang Shaolong was grateful, "Thank you Empress!"

Zhu Ji sighed, "Shaolong! I am so tired. So what if I have everything? I just cannot bring myself to be happy."

Xiang Shaolong knew that she is trying to get him to comfort her. He advised, "Empress must pull yourself together. The Crown Prince still needs your guidance and care."

Under such circumstances, he cannot bring up Lao Ai's issue.

Firstly, he cannot explain how he could forecast Lao Ai seducing her. Moreover, if Zhu Ji wants him to replace this future Lao Ai, he will be in trouble.

He knows that history can never be changed.

Zhu Ji was quiet for a while and softly added, "You must be careful of General Pang from Zhao. He is famous for his strategies and is very articulate. He is the new City Commander and is the most prestigious general in Zhao after Lian Po and Li Mu. For him to come personally, he must be here to spy on our army strength. Ai! I really do not know what Buwei is planning. Now, he is very close to the six states as if nothing has happened."

Xiang Shaolong is not bothered with this General Pang that he has never heard before. If not for Guo Kai's intimacy with Zhu Ji in the past and dare not come, this man will not even have the chance to come to Qin.

Both of them do not know what to say next.

After some unimportant exchanges, Xiang Shaolong bade his farewell. Zhu Ji is unwilling to let him go but is afraid of rumours and let him leave.

The moment he left the Empress palace, An Gu stepped up welcoming, "The Crown Prince wants to see Grand Tutor."

Xiang Shaolong walked with him towards the Crown Prince palace.

This head of the palace guards whispered, "After Grand Tutor has seen the Crown Prince, can you make a trip to General Lu Gong's residence?"

Xiang Shaolong understood his meaning and nodded in agreement.

An Gu did not say anything else. He escorted him to the Crown Prince study room and left.

With a heavy expression, Xiao Pan was seated on a long sofa north of the study room. Waving the usual courtesies aside, he got Xiang Shaolong to sit in front of him and viciously declare, "Grand Tutor! I want to kill Lu Buwei!"

Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted and exclaimed, "What!?"

Xiao Pan detailed in a low voice, "This is a violent man who forgets about father's benevolence and is worse than wild beasts. He claims to be a pioneering official in the rebirth of Qin and even planted his own son to be the next King of Qin. Without his death, I cannot consolidate my power as King."

Xiang Shaolong had intended to contact Xiao Pan, Li Si and Wang Jian to make trouble for Lu Buwei. He was astounded that Xiao Pan brought this up before he could. Hesitating, he asked, "Have you spoken to Empress about this?"

Xiao Pan answered, "Empress and Lu Buwei are deeply embroiled. If I told her, I will be scolded instead. Grand Tutor! With your invincible sword skills and intelligence, killing him should be easy right!"

Xiang Shaolong thought of Guan Zhongxie and felt that he is overrated by Xiao Pan but he could not say this to him. He sighed, "If we killed him, what will be the consequences?"

Showing the mature side of him, Xiao Pan detailed, "First, I will make you the Imperial Cavalry Commander. I will select a few loyal men and entrust them with important positions. If we can consolidate our power, we do not need that traitor. I am only afraid of Empress. If she works with him, we will be in trouble."

Xiang Shaolong questioned, "Do you love Empress?"

Xiao Pan was stunned and nodded.

Only Xiang Shaolong can understand him. Xiao Pan has gradually shifted his love for Lady Ni to Zhu Ji.

Xiao Pan is right. Zhu Ji knew that King Zhuangxiang was poisoned by Lu Buwei but did not hold it against him.

Xiang Shaolong explained, "I want to kill him more than you do. You should have guessed that he was the real culprit who caused Princess Qian's death. But before we have built up our strength, we should not act hastily. Moreover, the Qin military system is extremely complicated and it is hard to manage them. With a group of them supporting Prince



Cheng Chongqiao, it is better for us to bear with him for the time being.”

Xiao Pan brightened up and asked, “So Grand Tutor has agreed to be the Imperial Cavalry Commander?”

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, “I have just promised Empress!”

Xiao Pan was pleased, “I am relieved to have Master by my side.”

In this moment, he became a kid again.

His expression turning heavy again, he added, “Grand Tutor’s foresight is unparalleled. Study Attendant Li Si is the best example. His thinking is totally unlike other people and taught me that if we can grab hold of this opportunity and utilise our strengths well, we can expand out territories and eventually unite the world. So I must not let this heartless cad Lu Buwei control the Qin Court and affect my grand plan.”

Xiang Shaolong finally realised Li Si’s influence on Xiao Pan. He cannot regard Xiao Pan as a child anymore. Under the influence of the Qin Palace politics, he has become another person. And in the future, he shall be the first Emperor of China.

Xiao Pan coldly inquired, “How long to I have to wait?”

Xiang Shaolong calmly forecast, “The best time to act is at your coronation on your twenty-first birthday.”

This is right, because this is history.

Xiao Pan was mortified, "I would have to wait for another eight years!? Wouldn't Lu Buwei be beyond control by then?"

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "During this time, we can use him to eliminate those men who oppose your rule and at the same time, we can nurture your own organization and weaken his at the same time."

Pausing, he emphasized, "For politics, you can let Lu Buwei handle them as long as Xu Xian is there to keep him in check. You must do your best to gain the respect of the military. Let Lu Buwei be the bad guy and we remain as the good guys. With control of the military, Lu Buwei will not be able to escape your clutches. It has been proven time and time again that governing authority comes after military might."

Xiao Pan's body shook heavily as he repeated, "Authority after military."

Xiang Shaolong kicked himself for saying too much and continued, "There are two men who are loyal to us. They are Wang Jian and Wang Ben. They are terrific generals whom every King wishes to possess. With them leading your army, Lu Buwei is nothing to be afraid of."

In a daze, Xiao Pan asked, "What about you?"

Xiang Shaolong commented, "I will do my best to help you but in the end, I am still an outsider. You must win the hearts

and minds of the Qin military and use them to consolidate your power.”

Xiao Pan frowned, “But Lu Buwei has Meng Ao fighting for him and has made his two sons Meng Wu and Meng Tian assistant generals to assist Meng Ao in his battles. What can I do to counter them?”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “That is why Lu Buwei wanted to get rid of me. If Meng Ao discovers that his two sons nearly died under his scheming, how do you think he will feel? The two Meng brothers will eventually come to our side. You can use them to help you and it can even lessen Lu Buwei’s suspicions.”

Xiao Pan was delighted, “There is no one better than Grand Tutor. I know what to do.”

After further discussion, Xiang Shaolong took his leave.

Compared to Lu Buwei’s new Premier Residence that is still being constructed, Lu Gong’s residence is far from the Qin palace. Lu Gong invited Xiang Shaolong into a private chamber where an attendant served him tea and left them alone. Lu Gong smiled, “I heard that you are a descendant of Qin. However, there has never been anyone surnamed Xiang here. May I know which tribe do you belong to?”

Xiang Shaolong was in a dilemma and lied, “My surname came from my mother. I did not know who my father is, not to mention which tribe he came from. All I know that he was a Qin soldier. Ai! What a mess.”

Lu Gong, the advocate of Qin, did not suspect anything and nodded, "The people of Zhao are not as imposing and powerfully built as you. Your type of figure is not even seen often in Qin. You must be a mixed blood. I am good at judging people. Hei! From the first time I met you, I know that you are a righteous man."

Xiang Shaolong found himself understanding him better. Amused, he praised, "Lu Gong has great eyesight and I cannot hide anything from you."

Lu Gong sighed, "It will be great if I can really see everything. But I have miscalculated many things, including the early death of the late king. Ai!"

Xiang Shaolong quietened down.

Lu Gong stared sharply at him but in a calm and slow manner, asked, "What is the relationship between Shaolong and Lu Buwei?"

Once again, Xiang Shaolong was taken aback at his frankness and replied, "Why is Lu Gong interested?"

Lu Gong plainly state, "Shaolong need not deceive me. Lu Buwei and you are not on the best of terms. Otherwise, the Wu family need not hide in the countryside farms. Speak your mind! The Wu clan are the descendents of our Qin nobles. From our point of view, they are way better than Lu Buwei the outsider."

After such a long time in Xianyang City, this is the first time Xiang Shaolong has experienced Qin's racism. He sighed, "It's

a long story. After I propose Xu Xian to be the Premier, Premier Lu has been holding a grudge against me.”

Lu Gong smiled, “How can it be so simple? In Xianyang City, you are his number one enemy. Don’t tell me you have no idea!”

His eyes shining with deep thoughts, he slowly added, “All along, there have been rumours saying that the Crown Prince is not King Zhuangxiang’s son but Lu Buwei’s. At first, we discard them as lies spread by people who are opposing Lu Buwei and Empress Ji. Now, the healthy King Zhuangxiang suddenly died without a clear reason and we are forced to reconsider this issue.”

Xiang Shaolong can feel a gigantic headache coming. Lu Gong is the most respected man in the Qin military and his words represent the thinking of the Qin military leaders. If they regard Xiao Pan as Lu Buwei’s illegitimate child and supported Cheng Chongqiao instead. Lu Buwei and Xiao Pan will both be destroyed.

Lu Gong mused, “We must verify this issue before we can plan our next step. Just like we are not sure what is going on between you and Lu Buwei, so we petitioned to promote you as the Imperial Cavalry Commander to test Lu Buwei’s reaction. Surprisingly, the test is very successful as Lu Buwei is the only man who objects your promotion.”

Xiang Shaolong finally comprehends the complications of politics. When he first heard about it, he thought Lu Gong

and the military are in favour of him. Now, he knows the real reason and motive.

Lu Gong shook his head and bitterly smiled, "Actually, only they themselves know what is going on and it is rather difficult to prove their relationship. Not impossible but difficult."

Xiang Shaolong had a big shock and asked, "Is there a way to test?"

He was also puzzled that Lu Gong is discussing this with him. After all, isn't he close to Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan and may warn them beforehand?

Lu Gong mentioned, "We need Shaolong to help us with the testing."

Xiang Shaolong was staring at him in amazement when he recalled Zhu Ji's words and realised, "You want to conduct a blood test!"

Lu Gong seriously explained, "This is the only way to satisfy us. We shall put a drop of blood of each person into a silver bowl filled with a special chemical. It is a foolproof method."

Abruptly, Xiang Shaolong's thumping heart slowed down. As light as an astronaut in space, he nodded, "I will get the blood from Crown Prince. Lu Gong had better prepared a witness to see me drawing the blood personally from him. This way, there will be no tricks."

It is Lu Gong's turn to be amazed.

He looked for Xiang Shaolong as he is the closest to Zhu Ji after Lu Buwei. In addition, he is the one who personally saved them from Handan City. More or less, he should have an idea about the relationship between the three of them. If he hesitates about the blood test, Lu Gong will guess that something is amiss and know which Prince he will support.

Unexpectedly, Xiang Shaolong readily agreed and even wants him to provide a witness.

Both men were silent for a minute and Lu Gong decided, "Fine! I will get Lu Buwei's blood. If the Crown Prince is Lu Buwei's son, what will Shaolong do?"

Xiang Shaolong plainly state, "I am positive that the Crown Prince is the late king's own flesh and blood. The test will prove everything."

All of a sudden, his biggest headache has been resolved.

The blood test will 'prove' that they are not related and the Qin military will fully support Xiao Pan unlike now.

But with Zhu Ji's support, Lu Buwei can continue to expand his influence and control the politics.

As Xiang Shaolong was wondering about the efficacy of this blood test method, he thought deeper and kicked himself for thinking too much. History has proven that Xiao Pan will be Qin Shihuang.

## CHAPTER 6

## Before The Funeral

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG returned to the Wu residence.

The fire that night only burned down a rice granary. The rest of the buildings are not affected.

Over the past ten days, two thousand of the elite family warriors entered Xianyang City separately, increasing their fighting prowess.

Riding Jifeng, he rode through the main gates with Teng Yi, Jing Jun and the Guardians. The air is filled with loud noises



as the warriors are busy erecting sentry posts and other fortifications.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling great and jumped down his horse, wanting to inspect their work. Tao Fang came up and welcomed, "Lord Longyang is waiting for you in the main hall."

Teng Yi glanced at the huge courtyard in front of the residence and did not see any horse carriages or escorts. Puzzled, he asked, "He came alone?"

Tao Fang nodded.

Xiang Shaolong is excited to see him as well and know more about matters in Wei, including news about Zhao Ya. With Tao Fang, he entered the hall to see Lord Longyang.

He did not put on a fake beard this time but was dressed as a commoner to keep a low profile.

Tao Fang left the two men alone and Lord Longyang happily exclaimed, "I am delighted to see Brother Xiang doing well."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "From your tone, it seems that I should count my blessings to be able to stay alive."

Lord Longyang faintly sighed, "Countless people inside and outside of Qin are dying to kill you. There has been news that you are opposing Lu Buwei. With Lu Buwei's growing influence, even I am worried for you!"

Xiang Shaolong is already used to this drag queen's emotional outbursts. He bitterly smiled, "Paper cannot contain a fire. Nothing can be concealed from the world."

Lord Longyang was astounded and asked, "What is paper?"

Xiang Shaolong kicked himself, remembering that paper is only invented during the Han Dynasty. He lied, "It is my hometown dialect which refers to silk material."

Lord Longyang 'understood' and added, "I am here to pay my last respects to your late king. It is strange to have two kings die within four years. Everyone is heavily suspicious and Lu Buwei is really brave."

Xiang Shaolong knew that he is trying to trick him and sighed as well. Changing the topic, he asked, "How is Prince Xinling doing?"

Lord Longyang coldly replied, "This traitor got his just desserts. I don't think he will ever recover his former glory. My spies reported that he is indulging in women and wine and even disband many of his family warriors. Under these circumstances, the King should not make things hard for him anymore."

He lowered his voice and revealed, "Zhao Ya is very sick!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and exclaimed, "What!?"

Lord Longyang sighed, "When she was sick, she kept calling your name. Prince Xinling was so furious he did not step into her bedroom at all."

Xiang Shaolong was grieved upon hearing this. How he wished he can grow two wings and fly to Daliang straight away.

Lord Longyang assured, "Brother Xiang can rest easy. I have petitioned the King and brought her into the palace and send the best physicians to take care of her. If Brother Xiang is willing, I can send her to Xianyang City but you must wait till she gets better."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback, "She is so sick that she cannot travel?"

Lord Longyang intimately replied, "Lovesickness is the hardest to cure!"

Xiang Shaolong could not be bothered about the double meaning in his words. Impulsively, he declared, "No! I am going to Daliang to fetch her."

In a gentle voice, Lord Longyang advised, "Brother Xiang, do not let your emotions overwhelm logic. Xianyang City is now the battleground for all the strongmen of every state. If you leave like this and return to find your family annihilated, it will be too late for regrets."

Xiang Shaolong was not fully convinced and insisted, "I will send someone to fetch her. Can Lord please send someone capable to come along as well?"

Lord Longyang agreed, "No problem. Prince Zhen has an excellent opinion of you. If he knows it is to help you, he will

do his best. The King agreed to take care of Zhao Ya also because you rescued Prince Zhen.”

Xiang Shaolong put Zhao Ya’s issue aside and asked, “Except for Tian Dan, Li Yuan and General Pang, who are the other representatives?”

Lord Longyang disclosed, “Prince Dan represents the state of Yan and your old friend Han Chuang is here. Everyone is eager to collaborate with Lu Buwei and you better watch your back. They dare not do anything in Xianyang City but if Lu Buwei sends you out of Qin, there will be people trying to kill you.”

Xiang Shaolong was wondering if he should tell Lord Longyang that his assassins are led by Yan’s Xu Yiluan when Lord Longyang continued, “Li Yuan brought Chu’s youngest Princess along and hoped to match-make her with Prince Zheng. Lu Buwei has agreed on his behalf but Lu Gong, Xu Xian and Du Bi are voicing strong objections. If the matchmaking fails, Lu Buwei’s prestige will be affected.”

Xiang Shaolong commented, “The success of the matchmaking depends on the Empress’s decision. However, Lu Buwei will use some devious method to make her agree with his suggestion.”

Lord Longyang whispered, “I heard that the Empress favours you greatly. Why don’t you sow discord and destroy Li Yuan’s plans?”

Xiang Shaolong feared seeing Zhu Ji. If things go wrongly and they got together, he will have a guilty conscience and it also

affects his standing and reputation. He sighed loudly, "It is because she favours me that it is difficult for me to say anything."

Lord Longyang knew his character and concluded, "I came here in secret and cannot stay too long. Tomorrow morning, I will send someone to look for you. His name is Ning Jia and he is my trusted subordinate. He is capable and smart. With him accompanying your man to Daliang, the trip will be a success."

Xiang Shaolong thanked him profusely and sent him out.

Coming back into the house, he held a discussion with Teng Yi and Tao Fang.

He originally wanted Jing Jun to fetch Zhao Ya but he needed all the men he can muster now. Finally, he got Wu Guo to fetch her with five hundred elite warriors.

In the middle of the conference, Qin Qing actually sent someone to find him.

The three men were caught by surprise. Has this pure and virtuous beauty finally fallen in love?

By the time Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi, Jing Jun and the original Eighteen Guardians reached her place, it was nightfall, adding to the ambiguity of the situation. Everyone got seated at the simple main hall and two pretty maids begin to serve tea. Second Uncle Fang, the housekeeper, brought Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and Jing Jun into the inner hall.

Jing Jun was elated that his beauty treats him as an important guest while Xiang Shaolong is disappointed that this visit has nothing to do with their personal romance.

Men are like that. Even if they are not interested, they would not mind women falling in love with them as long as it is trouble-free.

Still in her mourning clothes, Qin Qing has a serious expression on her face. She greeted them and sat down in the host's seat.

Upon knowing that they have not taken their dinner, she instructed her maids to serve cakes to them and the Guardians.

Xiang Shaolong and his men did not hold back their appetites and munched on the cakes. The cakes are delicious and Jing Jun is full of praise for them.

Noticing her furrowed brows, Xiang Shaolong could not help but ask, "Why is Grand Tutor Qin looking for me?"

Qin Qing faintly sighed, "I may be thinking too much but something has happened today that I don't feel good about."

The three men were shocked. Putting their cakes down, they stared at her.

Qin Qing is uncomfortable with three men staring straight at her, especially Jing Jun's shifty eyes. Lowering her head, she described, "I went to the royal temple today to change the

flowers at the late king's altar. When I was about to leave, I was waylaid by Premier's guest-advisor Lao Ai."

The three men's expression grew heavy as well.

Jing Jun was incensed, "How daring! I must teach him a lesson. Who cares where is he from."

Teng Yi questioned, "Doesn't Grand Tutor Qin have any warriors escorting you?"

Qin Qing responded, "Not only do I have warriors escorting me; even the two Premiers are at the Royal Temple. When they heard my cries, they ran out."

Jing Jun coldly smiled, "Now Lu Buwei is in trouble!"

Teng Yi kicked him under the table.

Qin Qing faced Teng Yi and sincerely pleaded, "Brother Teng, please do not regard me as an outsider. Sister Yanran and I click very well. That's why I invited everyone here to discuss this."

Teng Yi was embarrassed and awkwardly agreed, "Sure! How did Lu Buwei handle this affair?"

Qin Qing's expression became more serious and slowly described, "Lu Buwei did a good job. In front of Premier Xu and myself, he got Lao Ai to kowtow and apologise. He even publicly censured him."

Xiang Shaolong could guess what is coming next as it is recorded in history. He sighed, "Did he proceed to send him into the palace to be a eunuch?"

Bewildered, Qin Qing asked, "How did you know?"

Teng Yi and Jing are even more fascinated. They have been with Xiang Shaolong the entire day. If there is anything he has seen or heard, they should have seen it or heard it as well.

Even if Philosopher Shi is reborn, he may not even guess that Lu Buwei is 'punishing' Lao Ai in such a manner.

Xiang Shaolong was in a fix, knowing that he has a slip of the tongue and revealed Heaven's Secret. No matter how he tries to explain, no one will believe that he is that lucky.

Qin Qing had thought that Xiang Shaolong has spies in the palace who told him. But witnessing the look of amazement on the faces of Teng Yi and Jing Jun, she had a big shock and interrogated with disbelief, "Grand Tutor Xiang only made a guess?"

Xiang Shaolong composed himself and pretended that it is nothing significant and sighed, "This is quite easy to predict. Lu Buwei's top priority is to get Empress Ji to support him fully. In Xianyang City, there is no one who knows her weakness better than him. Lao Ai is his strongest pawn. He will make Lao Ai a fake eunuch and let him enter the palace and seduce Empress Ji. In terms of scheming, we are way inferior compared to Lu Buwei."

Teng Yi and Jing Jun began to see some light but were still in awe about Xiang Shaolong god-like prediction.

Qin Qing stared viciously at Xiang Shaolong. After some time and still unconvinced, she commented, "I spend a long time



thinking about this matter before I reach this conclusion. Before I could finish speaking, Grand Tutor Xiang knows everything as if he is also present as well. I think Grand Tutor's intelligence is sky-high and the inferior Lu Buwei is therefore jealous of you."

Xiang Shaolong was feeling guilty and worried at the same time.

Zhu Ji and Lao Ai are like dry wood and fire. Nobody can stop it. What should he do next?

Jing Jun suggested, "Let me sneak into the palace and deliver a cut to him, making him a real eunuch."

Qin Qing cannot tolerate his coarse words and her face turned red. Displeased, she chided, "Brother Jing, we are talking about important issues!"

Teng Yi shot Jing Jun an angry look but Jing Jun is dissatisfied. Xiang Shaolong spoke coarsely too but this widow did not blame him. Xiang Shaolong knew that he has deceived them and relaxed. He was inspired and replied, "Grand Tutor Qin thinks too highly of me. It is a pity that nobody can stop them."

Qin Qing was taken aback, "But Empress always listens to Grand Tutor!"

In a frank and agonized manner, Xiang Shaolong replied, "The problem is that I cannot replace Lao Ai and thus, lose my advantage."

Momentarily, Qin Qing does not understand his meaning. After realising, she lowered her head and bit her lip, pondering, "I understand but this is no small matter. Not only does it concern the reputation of the palace, it will allow Lu Buwei to be even more aggressive. Isn't Grand Tutor Xiang worried at all?"

Xiang Shaolong earnestly suggested, "Why don't Grand Tutor Qing head to Bashu and accompany Lady Hua Yang and lead a peaceful life?"

Qin Qing was shaken and stared at him. With mixed expressions on her face and lost for words, she finally lowered her head and dismissed in a low voice, "I have my own life and Grand Tutor need not worry. It is late! Thanks for coming!"

The three men did not anticipate her to end the discussion so abruptly and were disappointed. As they left, Qin Qing did not bother to see them off. The night wind is blowing strongly as they left her residence.

Teng Yi could not hold back and asked, "Third Brother is not going to expose Lao Ai and Lu Buwei's scheme to Empress Ji?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "For Empress Zhu Ji, it is like fresh water after a drought. Who can resist?"

Jing Jun praised, "Fresh water after a drought. Lu Buwei is really good."

As he held his horse, Teng Yi sighed deeply, “If Lao Ai manages to control Empress Ji, can we still survive in Xianyang City?”

Xiang Shaolong icily state, “Firstly, Empress Ji is not so easy to be controlled. If fact, we can make use of this to support Lao Ai and make him break away from Lu Buwei. When that happens, Lu Buwei will be in trouble, not us.”

Teng Yi and Jing Jun were awestruck while Xiang Shaolong has leapt onto Jifeng and rode ahead towards the long street.

In this moment, he is full of confidence when dealing with Lu Buwei.

Because no one can change history, including Lu Buwei.

So this evil man will pay the price for playing with fire.

No one can change history. The only problem is – he doesn’t know his own fate!

The next day, at dawn, Li Si led a huge group of palace guards and the Imperial Edict to Wu Residence. Representing Xiao Pan, he officially appointed Xiang Shaolong as the General in charge of the Imperial Cavalry. Teng Yi and Jing Jun are appointed his assistant generals. They were presented with appointment letters, bows and arrows, official swords, army uniforms and emblems, as well as five hundred personal escorts. This shows that the King has been generous with them.

Xiang Shaolong is certain that this arrangement is planned by Li Si and is perfect. After receiving the Imperial Edict, Teng Yi personally selected five hundred men and got them to change into military uniforms. Together they rode towards the palace.

At the giant courtyard before the main palace, Xiao Pan has just finished the morning court session. With Zhu Ji by his side, he led both Premiers and his officials up an altar where he prayed to Heaven. The procession is impressive and majestic.

On this day, Xiang Shaolong and his men are exceedingly busy but joyful. He has to take over the Imperial Cavalry Command Centre east of the City and inspect his army. Later, he has to tie up the communication channels with the other ministries and even prepare for King Zhuangxiang's funeral tomorrow. The list is endless.

Fortunately, Xiang Shaolong enjoys support from the military leaders and Lu Buwei pretended to support him so everything went on smoothly.

Jing Jun is the grandest looking. Officially appointed at the assistant general of the Imperial Cavalry, he is in high spirits.

On the same day under Tao Fang's arrangement, Wu Guo and Lord Longyang's Ning Jia left for Daliang with five hundred elite warriors, determined to bring Zhao Ya back.

At night, Xiao Pan summoned Xiang Shaolong into the palace. Meeting him alone at the inner palace, he was infuriated, "Have you heard about Lao Ai?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Empress is involved with him right?"

Anxious and angry, Xiao Pan cursed, "The late king has yet to be buried and Lu Buwei this traitor brought this gigolo to be a fake eunuch and seduce Mother. I wish I can tear him to pieces."

Xiang Shaolong has to admit that Lao Ai has his way with women to seduce Zhu Ji in such a short time. Feeling bitter himself, he is disgusted with Zhu Ji for not monitoring her own behaviour. However, Zhu Ji has been lonely for some time and is a passionate woman. As a result, she cannot resist the seduction of Lao Ai the Casanova.

Xiao Pan is so mad he began to pace up and down the room. Xiang Shaolong could only accompany him in pacing.

All of a sudden, he stopped and stared at him furiously, "When I left Mother and you alone that day, I wanted you to comfort her. Of all the men in the world, I will only accept you being close to her."

Xiang Shaolong can only look back at him helplessly.

He understood Xiao Pan's thinking. Just like only he is good enough to be Lady Ni's lover in the past, Xiao Pan has regarded Zhu Ji as his mother and hoped that he will be Zhu Ji's lover as well. To a certain extent, he is Xiao Pan's ideal father.

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "If I do that, I will not be Xiang Shaolong."

Xiao Pan was astounded for a while. Then he nodded, “I understand. But now my heart is full of anger and hatred. I have this urge to barge into the back palace and give Lao Ai a heavy beating to vent my frustration.”

Pausing, he continued, “Ai! What shall we do now? Before I am officially crowned King, everything must be approved by Mother. If Lu Buwei controls her, I will face further constraints. This afternoon, Mother summoned me and wanted me to replace the head of the palace guards An Gu with Lu Buwei’s Guan Zhongxie. I violently objected and after quarrelling for two hours, she retracted her suggestion. She proposed to make Guan Zhongxie the Imperial Infantry Commander instead and I had to agree.”

He sighed loudly, “What should I do?”

Scanning his child-like face, Xiang Shaolong explained, “This is your mother tricking you. She knew that you will never change An Gu and proposed an alternative so that you will consent at the end.”

Xiao Pan was in a daze. Thinking hard, he confessed, “So this is how it is. I still cannot win her.”

Xiang Shaolong comforted, “Do not lose hope. You are still young and love her deeply. That is why you lost to her. Come! Let’s sit down and think it over and see if we can counter Lu Buwei’s scheme.”

Like a deflated balloon, a crestfallen Xiao Pan returned to his seat on the sofa and turned his attention to Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong seriously asked, "How did Crown Prince know about Lao Ai?"

Xiao Pan angrily recounted, "Yesterday morning, Lu Buwei's men brought Lao Ai into the palace. In front of Mother and I, he read out his crimes, saying he has just castrated him and ordered him to serve the palace as an eunuch. I am already suspicious because Lao Ai still looks full of life despite a recent castration. Only his face is slightly pale. Lu Buwei and Mother spoke in secret after that and Mother brought Lao Ai back to the Empress Palace. I felt that something is amiss and sent someone to investigate. They spent last night together."

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "What is so attractive about Lao Ai?"

Xiao Pan slammed the table and cursed, "Damn gigolo!"

He added, "Honestly, he is tall, handsome and imposing with some heroic air, similar to you. His skin is much whiter; no wonder Mother was smitten the moment she saw him. Ai! What shall I do?"

This is the third time he said these words. Zhu Ji's action has caused him to lose his bearings.

Xiang Shaolong came face to face with him and whispered, "Have you spoke to Li Si about this?"

Xiao Pan gave an agonized look, "Except for Master, I would not dare to tell anyone else. In fact, I have to keep it a secret for her."

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly. This is Xiao Pan's dilemma. With everyone eyeing his position, he is dependent on Lu Buwei and Zhu Ji. Without them, this twelve year-old will be fighting a lone battle. Before he is crowned King, he must protect Zhu Ji and Lu Buwei and consolidate his power. It is a complicated affair.

Xiang Shaolong shifted his position and looked up at the main pillar support the room. He breathed deeply and offered, "There are two great plans that will help you avoid this present danger and be crowned in the future."

Like a lost person who found the way home, Xiao Pan jumped for joy, "Master, tell me quickly!"

Xiang Shaolong watched him brightening up and was pleased. He explained, "First, we must win the support of the military. They are divided into four main groups. The most powerful tribe is central (Zhong Li) group and they are led by Lu Gong, Xu Xian and Wang Ling. They stand for righteousness and fairness. In a way, they are the most dangerous. If they turn against us, we will fight a losing battle. We can say that whichever side they choose, that side will benefit tremendously."

Xiao Pan frowned, "I understand this. The other three groups are Lu Buwei, Lord Gaoling and Cheng Chongqiao. How can we win the support of Lu Gong and his men?"

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to laugh, "It is simple. You must prove to them who you are."

He proceeded to tell him about Lu Gong and the blood test.



Xiao Pan was initially dumbfounded and exchanged a strange look with Xiang Shaolong. Simultaneously, they burst out in wild laughter, unable to believe such a ridiculous and funny experiment.

This future Qin Shihuang was laughing so hard that his tears are flowing. Panting for air, he asked, "What is the other plan?"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "That is to work with Lu Buwei."

Xiao Pan was flabbergasted and exclaimed, "What!?"

Xiang Shaolong analyzed, "Lord Yangquan may be gone but Cheng Chongqiao still remains. There is also Lord Gaoling who is waiting patiently at the side. Both of them are serious contenders for the throne. If we focus on opposing Lu Buwei, both of us will be at a disadvantage and these two groups can seize the opportunity to attack us. They may even work together and force you to abdicate and that will be disastrous. If Lu Buwei still treats you as his son but Lu Gong and his men knows a different truth, you can control both sides and eliminate both contenders first. Then you will turn around and attack Lu Buwei. By then, no one will dare to oppose you."

Xiao Pan slapped the table, "This is a good plan but Lu Buwei is a domineering man. If we allow him to do whatever he wants, he will end up with the most authority. If the military leaders are all his men, what can we do?"

Xiang Shaolong's mouth curled up in a smile and simply state, "This is called 'using your own weapon against yourself'. Not only will we not bother about your Mother, we will support Lao Ai."

Xiao Pan thought he heard wrongly and exclaimed, "What?!"

Xiang Shaolong explained, "Lao Ai is a heartless and selfish man, always looking for benefits. If he sees the opportunity, he will leave Lu Buwei's control. Since he knows the Premier residence well, he will get capable men to defect as well, weakening Lu Buwei. Your mother will support him and use him to counter Lu Buwei's influence. While they are fighting, you will be the one reaping all the rewards."

Pausing, he added, "Unless I am wrong, when your father is buried, Lao Ai will ask your mother for an official appointment. When that happens, you should know what to do!"

Xiao Pan is totally swept off his feet. At the end, he breathed in deeply and wondered, "Is there anyone in this world who is more scheming than Master?"

In this very moment, Xiang Shaolong knew that Xiao Pan has fully matured and is not a wilful child anymore.

## CHAPTER 7

## Deceitful Support

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BEFORE dawn, led by Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji, the royal family, every court official and the various representatives from the six states attended a grand but serious funeral procession. King Zhuangxiang's corpse is delivered from the Royal temple to the Royal Mausoleum for permanent burial.

Every single palace guard was activated to maintain law and order. Thousands of items were to be buried together with the coffin and the entire procession stretches over ten miles.

The citizens of Xianyang City put on mourning clothes and kneeled by the side of the streets, crying over the death of this benevolent ruler.

Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji cried heavily too. Everyone who heard them will be affected to cry as well.

Lu Buwei acted his part very well, expressing his deep sorrows and pain.

Xiang Shaolong, An Gu and Jian Sheng rode ahead and open up the roads for the procession. Jian Sheng is the current Imperial Infantry Commander as Guan Zhongxie is not officially appointed yet.

After Handan City's incident, this is the first time he saw Tian Dan, Li Yuan, Han Chuang and the rest. They paid attention to him but does not seem to realise he is Dong Horse Fanatic.

General Pang is a steady man of average build with a square face and large ears. When their eyes meet, he can see the intelligence shining from his eyes. No wonder he can rise to such a post based on his words alone.

In his twenties, Prince Dan is the youngest among them. He is of medium build and has a jade complexion, making others trust him. But to Xiang Shaolong, it is a different matter altogether. Zhao Qian and the maids indirectly died under his hands. If he has the chance, he will not let him off.

Qin Qing was mingling among the royal family and the esteemed guests. Xiang Shaolong waved to her but she pretended not to see him.

Under the strict and sad atmosphere, the procession has travelled for several hours. They finally reached the mausoleum in the afternoon.

The Royal Mausoleum is divided into two parts, an exterior and an interior, forming a 回 formation. There is a northern gate, southern gate, eastern gate and western gate. With the typical Chinese arch at the four corners, the mausoleum is heavily guarded with an official in charge.

The way leading into the mausoleum is lined with burial items such as pottery, furniture, books and clothes. The most important people entered the inner part of the mausoleum and were seated in a resting area while attendants start to move the burial items into the burial chamber. When everything is settled, Lu Buwei went to the front and delivered a eulogy. At the end of the eulogy, the burial process begins.

Xiang Shaolong was grieved as he recalled King Zhuangxiang's generosity and hot tears begin to flow down his face

When the coffin is finally brought into the mausoleum, Zhu Ji fainted. Thinking about the past two nights she spent with Lao Ai, Xiang Shaolong still find it hard to forgive her.

To a certain extent. He could sympathise with her behaviour. First, she lost this man who has treated her so well and even made her the Empress of Qin. Secondly, she knew it was Lu Buwei who poisoned him but could not take revenge. In such a helpless scenario, she reacted irrationally.

Even with this understanding, he still feels uncomfortable with her situation.

Back at the Wu residence that night, he had insomnia. The moment he woke up, he got his men to fetch Ji Yanran and the other girls back to Xianyang City. He really needed them by his side. Teng Yi naturally wishes to have Shan Lan around too.

As long as he is the Imperial Cavalry Commander, Lu Buwei dared not attack him rashly.

Three days later, the population of Xianyang City removed all signs of mourning and everything resumed as per normal.

Xiao Pan had not attended his coronation yet but he is now the King of Qin.

Except for Xiang Shaolong and the farsighted Li Si, no one will expect this kid to break centuries of deadlock and lead Qin to victory over the six states.

Back at the East Gate Command Centre, Xiang Shaolong was in a conference with Teng Yi and Jing Jun when Lu Gong came to find him.

Generals are the highest ranked positions in the military.

There are many different general ranking. Xiang Shaolong's Imperial Cavalry Commander is considered a lower ranked general and his army size is limited to fifty thousand men. But as he is considered half a City Commander, his status is slightly higher.

The highest ranked is Imperial General, which only Lu Gong ranks. Others like Wang Ling, Xu Xian, Meng Ao and Du Bi are only Great Generals. Thus, Lu Gong is considered the military chief.

Teng Yi and Jing Jun excused themselves while Lu Gong got seated at the chair of authority, smiling, "I came here to discuss something with you and to give you support as well. Now, everyone will know that I am behind you and will obey your command with question."

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly presented his thanks and appreciation.

Lu Gong's face became serious and revealed, "Are you aware that during the morning court session, Lu Buwei made another recommendation?"

Xiang Shaolong is not permitted to attend morning court yet. Frantically, he asked, "What are the changes?"

Lu Gong angrily detailed, "Lu Buwei made an exception and recommended a family warrior Guan Zhongxie to be the Imperial Infantry Commander instead of Lord Changping. Xu Xian and I objected strongly but were put down by Empress and Lu Buwei. Luckily, the Crown Prince got An Gu to guard Hangu Pass and made Lord Changping and his brother Lord

Changwen the new leaders of the Palace guards, preventing a military protest. Hng! Lu Buwei is getting more and more out of hand! He keeps promoting outsiders as if Qin has no talented men!”

Xiang Shaolong sighed with relief, glad that Lu Gong has treated him as a Qin native.

He felt some regrets not having his buddy An Gu in the palace anymore. But Xiao Pan’s decision is the best given the circumstances. It must be Li Si who advised him to promote another person from the Qin military.

It will help to convince Lu Gong that Xiao Pan is not on the same side as Lu Buwei and Zhu Ji.

Lu Gong lowered his voice, “I have spoken to Xu Xian and Wang Ling. We have unanimously decided that the blood test is the best plan. Look!”

From his bosom, he retrieved a special needle that has a sharp point but a wide base. He proudly explained, “This needle has a small opening. Once inserted into the flesh, blood will flow and accumulate at the base. When it pierces the skin, it is as painless as a mosquito bite and the bleeding will stop after it has been removed. If you are quick enough, the person being pierced may not even notice it.”

Xiang Shaolong received the needle from him and scrutinized it closely. Realising that it is probably the origin of acupuncture, he praised this invention and asked, “When do we act?”



Lu Gong explained, "According to our laws, ten days after the funeral, we must hold a hunting fair as a show of appreciation to everyone. The royal family, every official, the state representatives will all participate. Even those young men without official appointments will take part too."

As the Imperial Cavalry Commander, Xiang Shaolong naturally knew about this but did not expect it to be so grand. He was curious, "Is it very lively?"

Lu Gong bellowed, "Of course! Everyone is doing their best to display their talents and hope to be noticed by the new king. That year, I was talent-spotted by the late king during the hunt and nobody else received a bigger honour."

Xiang Shaolong was uncomfortable with the idea of killing animals blindly for pleasure and not for food. He will never stoop to such a level.

Lu Gong continued, "This is the best opportunity! I will draw Lu Buwei's blood while you get the Crown Prince's. Changping, Changwen and Xu Xian will be our witnesses. Hei! Only Shaolong is brave enough to draw the Crown Prince's blood. An Gu is a coward and he deserves to be posted out of Xianyang City."

Xiang Shaolong was highly amused. After going through the details of their plan, he sent him off respectfully.

Lu Gong's estimate is right on the spot. His rebellious subordinates underwent a huge attitude change and were more respectful than before, saving him and Teng Yi lots of time and effort.

In the evening, Zhu Ji summoned him to the palace.

Xiang Shaolong knew that it is inappropriate but still went ahead.

Zhu Ji looks calm and did not do anything extraordinary. She treated Xiang Shaolong warmly and expressed much concern. First, she enquired about his work as the Imperial Cavalry Commander and smiled, "I have warned Buwei that you belong to me. If you lose a single strand of hair, I will not let him off. Ai! The dead cannot come back to life. Will Shaolong see to your duties and do your best to protect Zheng'er, and leave everything else out of your consideration."

Xiang Shaolong understood where she is coming from. He secretly thought that this is her own wishful thinking and Lu Buwei is not an easy person to get along with.

At the same time, he can see the shift in Zhu Ji's attitude.

Unless she is happy with her present state of affairs, she will not want everything to stay the same forever.

He smiled, "I obey Empress's orders."

Zhu Ji wailed, "Don't give me that subordinate expression! I am able to speak my mind only when I am with you."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "If I do not act befittingly our positions, there will be gossips."

Zhu Ji was irritated, "There is nobody here and who cares about what they say! Who dares to offend me?"

Xiang Shaolong reminded, "Don't forget about Lady Xiuli. We are meeting each other privately and if word gets out, Xianyang City will be gossiping about us."

Zhu Ji smiled coquettishly, "You can relax. Cheng Chongqiao has been made Lord Changan and will leave with Lady Xiuli to Changan province tomorrow. Now, we do not have to run into each other in the palace. Everyone in the palace now belongs to me. See, I still have what it takes."

Xiang Shaolong thought that this is probably to prevent news about Zhu Ji and Lao Ai leaking out instead but he cannot expose her now. He plainly state, "Empress definitely has what it takes."

Zhu Ji was slighted stunned and stared at him with suspicions. In a gentle voice, she inquired, "This is the first time you are speaking to me like that. Are you unhappy that I am supporting Buwei? But everyone has their difficulties and must resort to doing certain things against their will. I am able to say this confidently because of what I went through in Handan City."

Xiang Shaolong is not sure she is defending Lu Buwei or herself with Lao Ai. After thinking, he replied, "Empress is right. I am feeling so helpless now."

Zhu Ji slowly sighed and stood up.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly stood up, thinking that she is sending him off. This charming and mesmerizing beauty came face to face with him and looked deeply into his eyes. In an enchanting manner, she offered, "The Xiang Shaolong I

loved the most is the heroic man I met at Handan City's Hostage residence. Full of courage and fearless, allowing a weak woman like me to fully rely on without hesitation. Shaolong! Now that I am freed, why should we be bothered about all the unreasonable restrictions? Let's rekindle our relationship."

Watching her heaving chest, pretty face and smelling her scent, Xiang Shaolong nearly wanted to embrace her in his arms and make passionate love, forgetting about the world outside and indulge in pleasure between woman and man.

He will be lying if he says he is not aroused or have feelings for her.

But with King Zhuangxiang's image still fresh in his mind, he resisted this temptation. When he was about to say something, heavy steps can be heard from beyond the door.

Both of them were shocked and hastily retreated a few steps from each other.

Incensed, Zhu Ji yelled, "Who is it?"

An attendant from the inner palace came in, kneeled down and kowtowed, "Lao Ai is here to accompany Empress!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and looked over at this handsome man. Lao Ai happened to raise his head to face him as well. His eyes were filled with hatred and pain.

Scrutinising him carefully, Xiang Shaolong was secretly impressed.

In terms of looks, other handsome men like An Gu, Lian Jin, Qi Yu and Li Yuan are not too far off. But in terms of overall feeling, Lao Ai stands out.

His body is as sturdy as a hunting leopard, with every muscle toned. A perfect body coupled with skin as white as snow and hair as black as charcoal. He does look similar to himself.

But his most attractive part is his wild and playful side. With his eyes burning with passion and emotion, it makes whichever girl that conquers him feel an extreme sense of accomplishment.

No wonder Zhu Ji is seduced by him in such a short space of time.

Zhu Ji is apparently flustered at his interruption and is afraid of Xiang Shaolong knowing about their affair. Her face turning white, she scolded, "What are you doing here?"

Lao Ai lowered his head and calmly replied, "Subordinate knows that Empress does not have any attendant with her and came in to see if you have any needs."

Apparently, Zhu Ji has given him some privileges but Xiang Shaolong dare not mentioned it. Zhu Ji ordered, "Get out of here at once."

If it was anybody else, he would have been executed on the spot.

Lao Ai is definitely here to vie with Xiang Shaolong for her attention, showing his hidden agenda. Since he knows that

he has made her very happy in bed, he knows that Zhu Ji will not do anything to him.

He humbly and respectfully answered, "Empress, please don't be angry. I am only trying my best to serve you."

He appears to disobey her order.

Zhu Ji was taken aback and peeped at Xiang Shaolong, howling, "Men!"

Two palace guards came into the room.

Xiang Shaolong knows that it is time for him to enter the picture. He held the two guards and helped Lao Ai up. Pleased, he commented, "This talented man is truly loyal to Empress. I like him the first time I see him. Empress must not blame him."

Zhu Ji and Lao Ai were astounded at his words.

Xiang Shaolong was amused and continued to exaggerate, "I am a good judge of character and this man is a dragon among men. Let's work hard together and do our best for Qin."

Zhu Ji saw that the two guards are in a dilemma and stood there dazed, she shot, "Get out!"

The two men knew they had angered her and ran out in a flash.

Lao Ai has always regarded himself as a dragon among men but nobody has praised him about it before! His hostility towards Xiang Shaolong decreased greatly. In fact, it is Lu

Buwei who gave him this mission to sow discord between Xiang Shaolong and Zhu Ji. Otherwise, he dare not barge in like this. Awkwardly, he replied, "Official Xiang is too kind."

Zhu Ji was staring at Xiang Shaolong in a daze. Taking this opportunity, Xiang Shaolong bade her farewell.

Zhu Ji dared not hold him back. Instead, it was Lao Ai who sent him out of the palace.

At the palace exit, like an old friend, Xiang Shaolong offered, "Attendant, let's work closely in the future."

Lao Ai was embarrassed, "Official Xiang is too generous. I dare not accept your offer. After all, I am just an attendant."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be angry and promised, "With brother's talent, why should you subject your will to others. This will not do! I will speak to the Crown Prince immediately and give you an official position. As long as Empress does not object, you will be promoted for sure."

Lao Ai was muddle-headed by his support and asked with surprise, "Why is Official Xiang treating me so well? Hei! I am originally from Premier Residence. Official Xiang should have heard of me before. I am sent into the palace as a punishment."

Xiang Shaolong feigned surprise, "You are from the Premier residence? No wonder I can see your talent the first time I set my eyes on you. Ai! What offence has Brother committed? Actually, it doesn't matter to me. With your talent, Premier Lu will seek to restrict you. I am a man who

keeps my promises and will take you to see Crown Prince at once. A talented man like you must be put to good use.”

Lao Ai was amazed but after consideration, he knew that Xiang Shaolong is telling the truth. Lu Buwei is a man who dislikes people who are more talented than him.

Presently, Lu Buwei is using him against Xiang Shaolong and Zhu Ji. In the future when Empress Ji is favouring him, Lu Buwei may seek to harm him.

If he can be on good terms with Xiang Shaolong and Crown Prince, it will help him in the future.

He happily nodded, “Many thanks for Official Xiang’s recommendation.”

He became alarmed and asked, “Will Crown Prince be unwilling to see a mere attendant like me?”

His is ranked the lowest among all the people in the palace. Strictly speaking, he is just a toy for the Empress. No wonder he is having low self-esteem.

Xiang Shaolong nearly burst out laughing and dragged him along.

Back at the Wu Residence, Ji Yanran and the ladies have arrived. Even Wu Yingyuan came personally.

Wu Tingwei’s execution has become a matter of the past.

Everyone knows that he has been promoted to be the Imperial Cavalry Commander and were jumping for joy.



Wu Yingyuan got his beloved son-in-law to the back garden for a private chat. He started, "Thanks to Shaolong, our family's reputation is growing day by day. In the past, applying for an exit permit takes almost two weeks; now, we get it on the spot. This is even better than our days in Handan City."

Xiang Shaolong laughed bitterly, "Father-in-law must be mentally prepared that Lu Buwei will become more powerful in the future and things will become more difficult for us."

Wu Yingyuan smiled, "By then, we'll be out of here. Wu Zhuo has sent word that he has discovered fertile land that stretches for thousands of miles. It is right beside Mount Huer Luan (?) and consists of grasslands and rivers. More importantly, there are no aggressive nomads nearby. With a few years of hard work laying the foundation, we can migrate there. I have decided to send another team of men there to start work. When we finally build our own state, our farms in Xianyang City will be insignificant."

Xiang Shaolong was happy for him and enquired about Mother-in-law. Wu Yingyuan sighed, "She'll be fine after a while. She will cry occasionally when she thinks about Tingwei."

Xiang Shaolong do not know how to console him.

That night, Xiang Shaolong and his three alluring wives chatted by the candlelight, telling them everything that has happened over the past few days. When he mentioned Xiao

Pan promoting Lao Ai to be an official, everyone was full of praise.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Like fish finding water, they made passionate love.

Out of the blue, Xiang Shaolong can feel that his entire year of bad luck is finally over. Currently, he is super confident in dealing with Lu Buwei.

## CHAPTER 8

## Jing Luo Canal

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG, Teng Yi and Jing Jun have finally worked out the intricacies of Imperial Cavalry. Taking charge, they begin to improve the training and operations.

The Imperial Cavalry consists of ten thousand soldiers and are divided into five armies of two thousand men each. They are elite soldiers handpicked from the Qin army to protect the palace guards. The majority of the soldiers are descendants of the royal family and previous officials. With

clean records and an attractive salary, everyone wishes to be part of them.

On normal days, The Imperial Cavalry will be based in Xianyang City's four strategic fortresses and are responsible for patrolling the city's external perimeter.

Issues within the city are the responsibilities of the Imperial Infantry. The two roles are very clearly defined.

If anything happens, the Imperial Infantry Commander is subjected to the Imperial Cavalry Commander's instructions. Between the two, the Cavalry Commander is the main Commander and the Infantry Commander is the assistant Commander. Every three months, they must practise their drills together to ensure that everyone knows their job well.

The Infantry Commander will report to the Cavalry Commander once a month and the Cavalry Commander will report to the King of Qin.

The Imperial Cavalry Commander is almost as good as the City Commander, receiving instructions directly from the King and must be a trusted and reliable person.

In the eyes of Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan, there is no one more suitable than Xiang Shaolong. Moreover, it was proposed by Lu Gong. Even with Lu Buwei's influence, he cannot prevent this from taking place. All he can do is to counter back by promoting Guan Zhongxie as the Infantry Commander.

The palace guards, imperial cavalry and imperial infantry formed the backbone of Xianyang City's defence.

Early in the morning, a promotion ceremony was being held at the palace courtyard.

An Gu was promoted to the rank of Great General and was commissioned to defend Hangu Pass, Hu Lao Pass and Yao Sai Pass. An Gu was delighted that his new post and rank were both higher than before.

His position is succeeded by Lord Changping Yinghou and Lord Changwen Yingyue, relatives of the royal family. One of them manages the palace cavalry and is made the Palace Cavalry Commander while the other manages the palace guards and chariots and is made the Palace Infantry Commander.

Using members of the royal family as leaders of the palace guards is a Qin tradition and even Lu Buwei cannot break this custom.

Guan Zhongxie was promoted to be the Imperial Infantry Commander and Lu Xiong is assigned to be his assistant General.

The Infantry army may be secondary to the Cavalry army but they are in charge of city defences and enforcing law and order, similar to our modern police and civilian soldiers. The people of Qin are naturally violent and it is not easy to be a good Infantry Commander.

This is the first time Xiang Shaolong met Guan Zhongxie.

As Tu Xian has described, this man is even taller than Xiang Shaolong but looks much uglier than his martial brother Lian

Jin. However, he has a coarse face, wide shoulders, a thick neck, a thin waist and long legs. Guan Zhongxie is brimming with masculine prowess and makes people feel like he is a wild beast. He is around the age of thirty.

With thick eye brows, a high nose and deep eyes that sparkle like electricity, he strode in long strides up the platform to receive his military seal. Those officials that objected to his appointment were blown away by his aggressive aura. It is no mystery why he can stand out among all the talented men in the Premier Residence and become Lu Buwei's favourite.

Jing Jun got Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi to focus on Lu Buwei's guests, informing, "The fellow in yellow is the scheming Mo Ao and the two warriors behind him are Lu Chan and Zhou Zihen."

Both men quickly assessed them.

Mo Ao is a tall man with a long face like a horse. His skin is an unhealthy shade of green and is around the age of thirty five. He has a thick beard like a goat and looks like an educated man. His eyes are half-closed but looks energetic and unpredictable.

Xiang Shaolong inched towards Teng Yi's ear and whispered, "If we do not kill him, we will die under his scheming sooner or later."

Teng Yi nodded his head in full agreement.

Lu Chan and Zhou Zihen have a big difference in their heights but both men looked very calm and athletic. From their appearance, Xiang Shaolong can tell that they are very fearsome swordsmen.

Tian Dan and the other states representatives are not present as this is Qin's internal affair. Moreover, it concerns the safety of the city and outsiders are not permitted to participate.

Xiao Pan is from the royal family of Zhao and spent most of his time in the palace. For the two years he spent in Qin, he was tutored everyday in the ways of the royalty. Moreover, his actual age is two years older than the genuine Yingzheng. At the promotion ceremony, an important event witnessed by tens of thousands of soldiers and officials, he behaved appropriately and naturally, earning the praise of officials and men alike.

Lu Buwei was proud of his 'son' and felt that his effort had not gone to waste.

After the ceremony is over, the crowds begin to disperse. An Gu, Changping, Changwen, Guan Zhongxie and Xiang Shaolong stayed behind to have lunch with Empress and Crown Prince.

Right Premier Lu Buwei, Left Premier Xu Xian, Generals Lu Gong, Wang Ling, Du Bi, Meng Ao, Official Cai Ze, Left Marquis Wang Wan, Right Marquis Jia Gongcheng were all invited to join them.

This is something like a welcome feast for those who are promoted.

Lunch was held in the inner hall.

While waiting for the Empress and Crown Prince to change their clothes, everyone gathered around and begin to chat among themselves.

An Gu introduced brothers Lord Changping and Lord Changwen to Xiang Shaolong.

The two brother look quite similar with square faces and big ears. Tall and intelligent looking, they are around twenty years old.

It may be due to An Gu's influence that both men are very friendly towards Xiang Shaolong.

After some courtesy talk, Lord Changping Yinghou suggested, "Official Xiang's martial arts have reach the pinnacle and even Wang Jian lost to you. After the duel, he praised you to the skies. When you are free, you must come over to my place and teach my stubborn sister a lesson. That day, she bet that you would lose to Wang Jian even before she sees you."

Lord Changwen laughed, "Bring Talented Lady Ji along and let us widen our horizons too. But you must keep it a secret or all the men in Xianyang City will come to our residence and barricade the roads."

An Gu interrupted, "Official Xiang must be careful when you fight with Lady Ying Ying. You must not underestimate her



sword skills. She trashed me the last time we fought. Hei! This girl is almost eighteen and still does not want to get married. All the handsome lads in Xianyang City are getting impatient!”

He lowered his voice and added, “Beside Qin Qing, she is the prettiest lady in Xianyang City.”

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed to hear this. Since this is the case, he will not visit them and avoid getting tangled in another relationship.

Presently, he is treading on dangerous grounds with heavy responsibilities. The thought of skirt chasing is the lowest priority on his list!

When he was about to excuse himself, Lu Buwei came over with Guan Zhongxie, laughing, “Zhongxie! Let me introduce you to your colleagues!”

A flash of disdain shot passed the eyes of the four men before they greeted him.

As Lu Buwei introduced him, Guan Zhongxie was cordial and smiling. But when he faced Xiang Shaolong, a murderous look flashed past his eyes.

Xiang Shaolong was annoyed at his stare and was feeling absurd.

They have crossed swords before but have to hypocritically face each other with a smile on their faces.

Lu Buwei treated Xiang Shaolong as per normal and invited, "We must find one day and bring everyone to my place to chat and drink wine. Recently, the state of Yan gave me some top grade courtesans who are still virgins. If you like, you can bring two of them home. It is a joy to hear them sing and dance for you."

Who can resist the lure of beauty? The two brothers were tempted and gave their thanks.

An Gu maintained his stand and rejected, "I appreciate Premier Lu's goodwill but I am unavailable. In fact, I have to leave for the eastern border two days later."

Guan Zhongxie interrupted, "Why don't we hold it tonight while General An is still in Xianyang City? We can even hold it as a farewell feast for you."

Hearing him interrupt under such circumstances, Xiang Shaolong could guess his importance to Lu Buwei.

An Gu could not reject any longer and agreed.

Lu Buwei glanced at Xiang Shaolong and insisted, "Shaolong must come. Let it be your punishment for leaving without a word that day."

Xiang Shaolong helplessly agreed.

While Guan Zhongxie and the Lords are chatting, Lu Buwei pulled Xiang Shaolong aside and questioned in a low voice, "There have been rumours that we are on bad terms. Have you heard about such news?"

Xiang Shaolong cursed secretly but acted surprise, "Is it so? I have never heard of it."

Lu Buwei frowned, "Shaolong need not deceive me. After the last mission, I can feel your attitude changing. After thinking about it, I interviewed the Meng brothers in detail and realised that you have mistaken Lu Xiong's conspiring with Lord Yangquan, causing the death of Princess Qian. It is a misunderstanding. The person who betrays us is assistant general Qu Douqi, which is why he is on the run and dare not return to Xianyang City."

Xiang Shaolong was elated. At first, he did not anticipate Wu Tingwei to pass Ji Yanran's fake information to Lu Buwei so quickly. Unexpectedly, this kid is eager to produce results and spoke to Lu Buwei already.

He knew that if he believed him so easily, Lu Buwei will be suspicious. He wore a heavy expression and his face and asked, "Please forgive me for being frank. On the night the late king died, somebody bribed my family warrior to lead me out of the city to be ambushed. Fortunately, I discover his ruse and narrowly escape. Does Premier Lu know about this?"

Lu Buwei's expression turned serious, "Did you capture the traitor?"

Wu Tingwei's death is a Wu family secret. The public was only informed that he was sent out of Qin for business. Thus, Xiang Shaolong lied, "He said he was bribed by someone

from Premier Residence and we killed him on the spot. After much difficulty, we managed to slip back to the farms.”

Lu Buwei ‘sincerely’ suggested, “No wonder Shaolong has doubts about me. You are my confidante and I will not harm my own men. I will investigate this matter thoroughly. I am sure it is related to Du Bi. He whole-heartedly supports Cheng Chongqiao and is using this opportunity to sow discord between Empress, Crown Prince, you and me.”

Xiang Shaolong is certain that his next target is Du Bi and Cheng Chongqiao. Therefore, he should be safe for the time being. However, things are unpredictable and he feigned surprise, “I did not think so far ahead.”

The gong sounded at this instant, signalling the start of the banquet.

Lu Buwei hurriedly added, “The storm is over and so is the misunderstanding. Shaolong must cooperate with Guan Zhongxie and defend our city well. I have high expectations for you.”

Xiang Shaolong agreed on the surface but was cursing Lu Buwei’s ancestors secretly.

Everybody lunched in harmony.

Guan Zhongxie is very articulate and knows his boundaries. Most impressively, he is able to praise people indirectly without looking too obvious. He is the kind of person you can curse when his back is turned but when chatting; you will never be bored by his words.

Lu Gong and the others have a good opinion of him but disliked him for ganging up with Lu Buwei.

Zhu Ji displayed her talent and expressed her appreciation to everyone, making those present delighted with her praises. Lu Buwei, Cai Ze and herself lead the interaction, adding plenty of excitement to the banquet.

Xiang Shaolong subtly noticed Left Marquis Wang Wan and Right Marquis Jia Gongcheng were supporting Lu Buwei, becoming his conspirators as well.

Of course they are with him, now that Lu Buwei is in power. If Lu Buwei is toppled, it will be a different story altogether.

Meng Ao may be defeated but he had conquered the three provinces of Sanchuan, Taiyuan and Shangdang, allowing the territory of Qin to expand greatly towards the east. An eastern base was built, scoring him a big merit. Thus, Lu Buwei is even more reliable with Meng Ao's accomplishments.

The ultimate defeat under Prince Xinling's combined army is forgivable. Anyone else in his position will be defeated too.

Among the three Tiger Generals of Qin, Wang Ling has been slowly won over by Lu Buwei and is on good terms with him. Now, he is not as friendly to Xiang Shaolong compared to Lu Gong and Xu Xian.

Only Du Bi is constantly bickering with Lu Buwei and state their differences clearly, not even giving face to Empress Ji

and Crown Prince Zheng. As he is still a crucial military leader, Lu Buwei cannot do anything to him.

Cai Ze detailed, "Ever since Premier Lu enter politics, Qin has gained three provinces. Originally, we have ten provinces of Ba, Shu, Hanzhong, Shang, Beidi, Hedong, Longxi, Nan, Qianzhong and Nanyang. With Sanchuan, Taiyuan and Shangdang, we now thirteen provinces. It is a milestone for Qin's prosperity. We have twelve million inhabitants, hundreds of thousands of soldiers, thousands of chariots, tens of thousands of horses. The six states may be strong or weak but none of them is as good as us."

These words are to flatter Lu Buwei.

Lu Buwei was overjoyed to hear this but pretended to be humble and gave the credit to the late king and Xiao pan.

Everyone was lost for words as this is genuine truth.

Great General Du Bi frowned and faced Prince Zheng, asking, "Our country is improving by leaps and bounds. What future plans does Crown Prince have?"

Everyone frowned upon hearing his words.

He is only a thirteen year old.

If he was born as the Crown Prince, there will be tutors who will teach him how to govern a country from young. The problem is Xiao Pan 'grew up as a commoner' and has only been in Xianyang City for two years. As the present King but with limited experience, he will not give a satisfactory answer.

Du Bi obviously despise him and purposely put him on the spot.

Unexpectedly, Xiao Pan smiled and replied in his child-like voice, "In terms of prestige, there is no one better than one of our Qin's founding King, King Mu Gong. But even he cannot unite the world as Zhou De is still alive and feudal lords ruled the lands. After the reign of Xiao Gong, the states begin to fight among themselves, giving us an opportunity to take a break and build our country. As the days go by, our enemies become weaker as we grow stronger. Presently, there is once in a millennium opportunity to unite the world as long as the six states do not work together. Otherwise, even if the Yellow Emperor is reborn, he cannot unite the six states."

Everyone was flabbergasted as they did not expect this kid to have such extraordinary views.

Only Xiang Shaolong knew that it is Li Si's views. He was impressed that Xiao Pan can improve on it and say it out fluently.

Du Bi was dumbfounded and stared blankly at Xiao Pan.

Xiao Pan's words have secured a foothold in the hearts of the officials.

Lu Buwei laughed, "The Crown Prince has great insight and my Spring and Autumn Annals of Lu have not been written in vain. Even when we have won, we must continue to work hard and govern the country with love. You must never forget this."

Not only did he grab the credit for himself, he acted like a father lecturing a son, making all those present frown deeply.

Zhu Ji smiled, “Zheng’er is still young and we must still depend on Premier Lu and everybody’s support.”

No one dare to rebut Lu Buwei after hearing her words.

Lu Buwei added, “Recently, I met a man from Han who knows how to dig canals. He recommended that we can open up a water channel between River Jing and River Luo. That will irrigate hundreds of thousands of hectares of fertile land. This suggestion will benefit our state tremendously. Will Empress and Crown Prince permit me to start work?”

The moment he heard this, Xiang Shaolong knew that Lu Buwei is trying to grab more power.

To dig a canal that stretches for hundreds of miles will take ten over years. It will also use up plenty of men and resources from Qin.

If this canal is to be dug, a significant amount of men and resources will be assigned to Lu Buwei since he is in charge. This will boost his authority accordingly.

Such an massive project should be brought up during morning court and have the various ministers analyzing its worthiness. Instead, he chose to bring it up now. Cai Ze, Wang Wan and Jia Gongcheng are here to support him, proving that it has all been planned earlier.



Zhu Ji was pleased, "Since Premier Lu feels that this is beneficial to us, it must be so. Does anyone else have anything to add?"

Cai Ze and the two marquises voiced their support.

Before Xu Xian has a chance to say anything, Zhu Ji announced, "Premier Lu shall see to this. Once you have the plans, submit them to the Crown Prince to have a look. If there is no problem, you can start work immediately."

With a few sentences, Lu Buwei's authority has increased considerably.

Xiang Shaolong could only think of Mo Ao. Such a indirect power grabbing plan can only come from his wicked but ingenious brain.

Without killing him, it is hard to defeat Lu Buwei.

With Zhu Ji and Lu Buwei supporting each other mutually, not to mention the other officials, even Xiao Pan's opinion was not consulted.

The only way to destroy this treacherous partnership is through Lao Ai.

## CHAPTER 9

## Conflict

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

IN front of Li Si and Xiang Shaolong, Xiao Pan blew his top over Lu Buwei, cursing, “Why would I want to read his stupid Annals of Lu? He wrote so much about morals and virtues but he himself is an asshole. Tell me, Study Attendant Li, what is the logic behind his theory of ‘ruling by virtue, the world does not belong to one man but men belonged to the world’? Why don’t he get rid of me as well and rule Qin directly.”

Xiang Shaolong and Li Si glanced at each other, choked by the forceful scolding of Xiao Pan.

After lunch, Xiao Pan had summoned Xiang Shaolong into the study.

Zhu Ji spent most of her time with the newly-promoted Lao Ai and did not have much time for her growing child.

But Xiao Pan still loved this surrogate mother. He only cursed at Lu Buwei and did not say anything about her.

Li Si was frightened and kneeled down, kowtowing, "Crown Prince, please be appeased!"

Xiao Pan barked, "Get up and start explaining to me."

Li Si stood up and respectfully begin, "Qin has been prospering for four generations and possess a strong army. The feudal lords are not righteous people. You must use the military to overcome them and govern the country with laws. The commoners will look up to the officials as an example. There is no other way."

Xiao Pan calmed down and asked, "What about the Ruler's principles?"

Li Si fluently replied, "I have been travelling all over the world and analyzed the politics of every state. It is pretty much the same everywhere. Firstly, it is the communication of the King's orders. Power must be held in his hands and law must be used to govern the country, winning the support of the people and strengthening the country. Premier Lu's 'Govern the country with morality and

righteousness' is just plagiarising Confucius's impractical ideas. It only sounds good but cannot work in real life."

To Xiang Shaolong who came from the 21st century, Li Si's theory is correct and managed to pinpoint the realities of life. The only issue is that the monarch is not subjected to the law like everyone else. Until two thousand years later, nothing much will change.

Since Xiao Pan came to Qin, he received the teachings of Shang Yang which emphasizes on power and military might. Moreover, he grew up in the palace of Zhao and knew the value of power. This will make him clash with Lu Buwei in the future.

Recently, he came into contact with Xiao Pan more frequently and found this kid to be developing his own set of thoughts. If there are people around him, he will use gestures to highlight his authority. He is becoming more and more like the future Qin Shihuang.

Xiao Pan appears to be fully satisfied with his answer and nodded, "From today onwards, Subject Li shall be my Palace Librarian and be responsible for all work related to books in the palace. You need to attend morning court every day."

Li Si was overjoyed and gave his thanks.

Xiang Shaolong was dazed and felt that Xiao Pan really have what it takes to rule Qin in the future.

Although everything in the palace has to be approved by Zhu Ji, she will not fall out with her son over a librarian. Moreover, her son has just promoted her secret lover.

Xiao Pan gestured, "I have something to discuss with Grand Tutor Xiang."

Li Si got the hint and took his leave.

Xiao Pan sat down and sighed, "You saw it for yourself how Empress and that traitor are singing the same tune. Even I do not have a chance to speak up."

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "No! Crown Prince performed excellently and won the hearts of the officials. Now, the Crown Prince is only lacking in patience!"

Xiao Pan continue scolding, "Lu Buwei took all the credit for himself, wanting both power and fame. He may even want the throne!"

Pausing, he angrily added, "The Annals of Lu mentioned that we must punish evil men and not take bribes; we must give good men official positions. The good men is referring to himself. He is the one accepting bribes. And yet he says that the King must be frugal and lead by example."

Although there is still a long time before his coronation, Xiao Pan's dissatisfaction with Lu Buwei is growing every day. The moment he comes into power, Lu Buwei will be toppled for sure.

Xiao Pan asked, "Have you seen Li Si's classmate, Han Fei's work? He mentioned, Since Shang Yang's reforms, Qin has

become rich and strong but there is still evil at work. The people really getting wealthy are the ministers. He also mentioned, The Marquis of Rang crossed Han and Wei to attack Qi and did not even gain any territory after five years of war but was given a title. The Marquis of Ying attacked Han for eight years and was also given a title. Since then, everyone followed their example and start wars. If they win, they will be promoted; otherwise, they will be conferred a title. The King has no idea about all these treachery. What fascinating views he has! I cannot wait to meet him.”

Xiang Shaolong has not seen Han Fei’s work before and was impressed by his literature and brilliance. He curiously asked, “Is it Li Si who introduced them to Crown Prince?”

Xiao Pan shook his head, “It is Grand Tutor Qing who introduced them to me.”

Xiang Shaolong thought that this is human nature. Li Si may be his good friend but he knows that he has a one-track mind and will not easily accept the teachings of others.

After a moment of reflection, Xiang Shaolong assured, “We have stirred up Lao Ai’s ambitions. If we can give him more benefits, I am confident that he will betray Lu Buwei and set up his own organization. When that happens, Empress will stand on his side and counter Lu Buwei. We will then reap benefits from their fighting.”

Xiao Pan sighed, “Is there anything else we can do? I did not want to approve the canal project or the majority of our men and resources will be under his control.”

Xiang Shaolong plainly state, "This strategy comes from a person named Mo Ao. Once this man is eliminated, Lu Buwei is as good as someone who has lost half his brain and will be easier to deal with.'

Xiao Pan cheered, "Master has finally decided to act?"

Xiang Shaolong's eyes flashed with a strong killing aura and coldly promised, "Lu Buwei's schemes originated from this man. He is considered my arch enemy and how can I not avenge Princess Qian's death? I guarantee he will not survive the three day hunting fair!"

Xiang Shaolong was about to leave the Crown Prince palace when a sweet voice called him from behind, "Grand Tutor Xiang!"

Xiang Shaolong was caught unaware and turned his head. A lively Qin Qing came into his sight.

She sauntered up to him and solemnly apologised, "My mistake. I should have addressed you as Imperial Cavalry Commander."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "Your words are filled with sarcasm. Are you still grudging me for saying the wrong things that night?"

Qin Qing was stunned at his forthrightness. Her alarmed expression is enchanting and even Xiang Shaolong who is used to seeing pretty women feasted his eyes on her beauty.

However, her attitude remains the same and coldly replied, "Not really. Grand Tutor's words are right. Men are like that,

always thinking that they are right and everyone else should listen to them.”

Xiang Shaolong was amazed at her angry words. But since it was her who approached him, he should have a chance to maintain a certain degree of relationship with her.

He raised his hands in mock surrender, “I give up and I throw in the towel. Grand Tutor Qin please forgive my incompetency and foolish behaviour.”

Originally, Qin Qing successfully maintained her cold demeanour but now, like the sun after the storm, she lowered her head smiling and wailed, “You are incorrigible.”

Heavens! If she gives him this hot-and-cold treatment continuously, he may cross his own line and fall in love with her.

Luckily, Qin Qing resumed her coolness and lightly sighed, “I cannot forgive you because you did not expose Lu Buwei’s scheme to Empress. But after thinking, I find it reasonable. Everyone is trying their best to get into Lu Buwei’s good books and even you are not an exception.”

Xiang Shaolong felt that he was severely misunderstood.

But he cannot rebut her.

How can he tell her that he cannot change the path of history and thus, will not support Lu Buwei as Lu Buwei will be the ultimate loser at the end?



While he was lost for words, Qin Qing added with disdain, "I felt bad for Sister Yanran to have married a husband who panders to those in power."

She turned and left.

Watching her graceful, swan-like posture moving away from him, he roared, "Hold it!"

The nearby palace guards were alarmed and looked in their direction. They saw the respected Grand Tutor of Crown Prince Zheng, Xianyang City's number one beauty Qin Qing on one side and the Imperial Cavalry Commander Xiang Shaolong on the other side. Helplessly, they pretended not to have heard or seen anything and returned back to their original duties.

Qin Qing casually halted and coldly snorted, "Are you going to arrest me? Now, you are in power and enjoy the backing of several influential people. Naturally, you will not see eye to eye with me."

Xiang Shaolong nearly exploded. Striding to her back, he angrily exclaimed, "You!"

Qin Qing simply asked, "Are you trying to create a scene in front of the entire palace?"

Xiang Shaolong composed himself and discouraging hissed, "Forget it! You can think whatever you like! I know what I am doing."

Qin Qing softly asked, "Aren't you just a lackey of Lu Buwei?"

Xiang Shaolong felt terrible to be misunderstood by this beauty and shot out without thinking, "I wish I can grab hold of him and... Hei! It's nothing."

Qin Qing turned around and was pleased, "Now you are telling the truth. But why did Mister Xiang did not expose Lu Buwei's scheme to seduce Empress?"

Xiang Shaolong realised that she acted in such a manner to force him to reveal his true self and was dumbfounded. He stared blankly at her attractive face which only Ji Yanran can match.

For once, Qin Qing did not mind him appreciating her looks. Revealing two rows of neat and snowy white teeth, she smiled, "Please forgive me for tricking you. But you are such a chauvinist man and always keep secrets from women, especially me. What did you say to King Zhuangxiang on his deathbed?"

Xiang Shaolong hardened his heart and bend forward towards her, admiring her flawless skin, her petite ear and her novel earring. In a hushed voice, he disclosed, "I promise His Majesty that I will kill Lu Buwei one day to avenge him and told him to leave peacefully."

Hot tears flowed continuously from Qin Qing's eyes.

Through her vision blurred by tears, she saw Xiang Shaolong walking away from her.

To keep his dinner appointment at the Premier Residence, Xiang Shaolong quickly left the palace and rushed home to shower and change.

Naturally, the Tian sisters were tending to him

Music from Ji Yanran's playing of the flute can be heard from the rear garden. The tune was sad and full of pain. Yanran played for a while, stopped, resumed playing and stopped again.

Xiang Shaolong was finding it strange and proceeded to the rear garden to see his pretty wife.

Ji Yanran was seated in the garden pavilion and holding her flute. Something seems to be on her mind.

Xiang Shaolong went up behind her and stretched his hands in front, embracing her into his bosom. Kissing her delicate face and smelling her scent, he implored, "Why is Yanran's music so melancholic?"

Ji Yanran slowly explained, "Today is the anniversary of our country's annihilation. Thinking that our grand empire is gone just like that, I cannot help but be distracted. People fight and countries fight. When will everyone see eye to eye with each other?"

Xiang Shaolong went for her lips and kissed her heavily, sighing, "This will never change. Everyone is out to benefit themselves and it doesn't matter if it is one man, an organization, a tribe or a country. As long as greed and benefits are present, fighting is unavoidable. For example,

there is only one Talented Lady Ji whom I have gotten. Other people will not have a share of you and will fight with me for you.”

Ji Yanran was greatly amused and hugged him in return, shaking her head in amazement.

Xiang Shaolong asked, “Did you have an afternoon nap? When I first saw you in Daliang, you just woke up from your nap and your fragrance is overwhelming.”

Ji Yanran was happy with his teasing and giggled, “Nonsense. Hubby seems to be in a good mood today.”

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, “Don’t even ask. I was tricked by your good friend Qin Qing and nearly blew my top.”

Ji Yanran was surprised, “Are you sure? She is a proud woman but still has a good opinion about you. Based on our friendship, she should not give you any trouble!”

Hugging her, Xiang Shaolong lead her to another side of the pavilion. After they got seated, he told her the whole story.

Ji Yanran was laughing non-stop like a blossoming flower. Even though he is familiar with her looks, her charming posture aroused him and he began to fondle her.

Ji Yanran held his naughty hands and wailed, “Stop tempting me. You are going to the Premier Residence for dinner soon.”

Xiang Shaolong was reminded and stopped immediately. Curious, he asked, "How did Qin Qing become a widow? Do you know about her background and history?"

Ji Yanran softly sighed, "Sister Qin is a royal descendant and her forte is in academic. At the age of sixteen, she married a capable general according to her parents' wishes. Sadly, on the day of their wedding, her husband received a military order to enter war at once. He did not return."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Such a pitiful girl!"

Ji Yanran objected, "I don't think she is pitiful. Sister Qin knows how to enjoy life and loves to trim plants. Once, I saw her spend an entire day trimming a pot of peonies. I cannot be like her and entertain myself and be lost in my own world. Unless it is with you Xiang Shaolong!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "I have just heard the best flattery in the world. But you are right. Qin Qing an elegant and virtuous lady who is as calm as the moon."

Ji Yanran laughed, "But her peaceful composure has been shaken by you. It is said that she never talks about men but she kept asking me about things related to you. When I told her about you, her eyes are shining with excitement. Hng! I did not pick the wrong person to marry."

Xiang Shaolong was dazed, "You are telling me all her secrets; are you trying to encourage me?"

Ji Yanran seriously state, "On the contrary. Sister Qin is special and commands the highest respect from all Qin

women, like a goddess of chastity. Unless you can bring her away from here, you will create endless trouble for you and for her if you violate her purity.”

Xiang Shaolong was awe-struck and promised, “Relax! After the unfortunate incident of Princess Qian and the maids, I have given up skirt-chasing. Except for my wives and maids, I have no other desires.”

Ji Yanran straightened up and repeated, “Given up skirt-chasing. Ai! Why does hubby’s casual words always enlighten me and taught me something new?”

Xiang Shaolong was feeling guilty. He managed to woo this top beauty and shake the resolution of the pure Qin Qing because he has two thousand years of history backing him up.

This is his trump card in betting his life against Lu Buwei’s. Otherwise, he would have been killed a long time ago.

At this very moment, Wu Tingfang and Zhao Zhi came home with Xiang Bao’er whom they had brought out to play. Xiang Shaolong accompanied them for a while until evening time. He then made his way to the Imperial Cavalry Command Centre to meet up with Teng Yi and Jing Jun. Together, they rode towards the Premier Residence for Lu Buwei’s banquet.

## CHAPTER 10

## Premier Residence Banquet

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

ARRIVING at the Premier Residence, Master Tu Xian is waiting to welcome them.

This old friend whispered a secret meeting time and place to them before getting his men to bring them into the Eastern Hall where the banquet is being held.

He was the last to arrive. Lord Changping, Lord Changwen and An Gu were there before him. Unexpectedly, Tian Dan and Li Yuan were present as well. Tian Dan's General Dan Chu is also present.

As a host, Lu Buwei introduced the three of them to Tian Dan and the rest.

Xiang Shaolong recognized Tian Dan but pretended to meet him for the first time. Tian Dan is scrutinizing him carefully but did not display any recognition. However, this devious man masks his thoughts well. Even if he spots something wrong, he will not express it on his face.

Lu Buwei continued to introduce them to the other guests from the Premier Residence. Guan Zhongxie, Lu Xiong are definitely joining them for the banquet. The others are Mo Ao, Lu Chan, Zhou Zihen and his other clansmen.

Mo Ao is a quiet man with little words, keeping a low profile. If not for Tu Xian's warning, nobody will know that this man is Lu Buwei's chief strategist.

Li Yuan is looking great and was quite friendly and polite towards Xiang Shaolong. From his facial expressions, he did not show any signs of jealousy about losing Ji Yanran to him.

Xiang Shaolong was thinking about Guo Xiu'er who married him. Is he treating her well?

Love can be the biggest mental burden.

The three allied states of Han, Zhao and Wei were not invited to this banquet, showing that Lu Buwei supports only the friendship between Qin, Qi and Chu. Since this is the case, Yan should be invited as well. It is possible that Yan has caused the death of Princess Qian and Lu Buwei did not



invite them on purpose so as not to make things difficult for Xiang Shaolong.

Everyone got seated.

Just by looking at the seating arrangements, Xiang Shaolong can tell that it has been thought over carefully.

The banquet is held in the large hall with people seated on two side rows. Tian Dan and Li Yuan were seated at the first seat of the two rows. Lu Buwei himself was seated beside Tian Dan while An Gu is accompanying Li Yuan. Following them were Xiang Shaolong seated with Guan Zhongxie; The Changping brothers with Dan Chu and Lu Xiong, followed by Teng Yi, Jing Jun accompanied by Tu Xian and Mo Ao, etc.

Tian Dan started, "If this banquet is held ten days later, it will be surely held at the new Premier Residence."

Lu Buwei laughed gleefully at his remark.

Until now, Xiang Shaolong does not know how these two men are related but he can guess that there are some dealings going on between them. Otherwise, why didn't Qi send their forces to join Prince Xinling's combined army?

Or it could be Li Si's deduction that Qi is only good at boasting and lack real military prowess.

Li Yuan comes from Chu which took part in fighting against Lu Buwei's General Meng Ao but was still well-received by Lu Buwei. Thankfully, Xiang Shaolong knew what is going on and was not surprise at all.

At the end of the day, the most influential man in Chu is Lord Chunshen. He may indulge in women and wine but is someone who looks at the big picture and is on good terms with Prince Xinling. He will definitely support Prince Xinling by sending the Chu army to join his combined army.

To execute his plan to ally with Qi and Chu while attacking the three allied states (Han, Zhao & Wei). Lu Buwei has to do his best to win Li Yuan to his side. If Li Yuan can topple Lord Chunshen and gain military control, he can attack the eastern states in peace without fearing intervention from Qi and Chu.

Tian Dan is not easily tricked so there must be a secret agreement between Lu Buwei and him.

This is what politics is all about.

Secret arrangements can have a far greater effect than the results of a fierce battle.

To Xiang Shaolong who knows the eventual winner of the Warring States Period, Tian Dan and Li Yuan are making unwise decisions.

But to the people who existed during these times, the future is unpredictable.

Warlords and heroes have fought countless battles for centuries, making everyone believe that this will go on forever.

Qi and Chu had hoped to reap rewards from the fighting between Qin and the allied states.

Tian Dan leaned towards Lu Buwei and whispered to him. From their expressions, there is something going between them.

While waiting for the dishes to be served, everyone began chatting among themselves.

Xiang Shaolong did not want to speak to Guan Zhongxie but the next table is a few feet away from them. He knew that conversation is going to be unavoidable.

Guan Zhongxie began, "Official Xiang's swordsmanship is famed throughout Qin and I value martial arts more than my life. We must find one day and exchange pointers. "

Xiang Shaolong could guess that his words sound nice but he is actually trying to beat him in a duel and gain fame for himself.

But he is a real expert after all. His posture, footsteps and balance reveals everything about his real fighting talent. Among all the men he can duel before including Yuan Zong, Teng Yi and Wang Jian, this man should be the most formidable.

If his arm strength is stronger than Xiao Weimou, Xiang Shaolong is likely to lose unless he resorts to some extraordinary fighting techniques.

He beat Lian Jin as he applied the correct strategy and his Mohist sword is much heavier, thereby forcing Lian Jin to be out of breath and dying a tragic death.

This method will not work on Guan Zhongxie.

He smiled, "Official Guan may not know about our rules yet. The King has decreed that military officials are forbidden to duel among themselves."

Guan Zhongxie was startled and weakly replied, "Official Xiang is mistaken. How would I dare to duel against you; I am only suggesting we examine each other's swordplay!"

Xiang Shaolong officially state, "I see. I have misunderstood you."

Guan Zhongxie cheerfully added, "I heard that the Crown Prince loves sword fighting. Premier Lu is concerned that Official Xiang may be too occupied and wanted me to teach the Crown Prince but forgot that I am very busy myself. Premier Lu may be a brilliant man but he makes some small errors as well!"

Xiang Shaolong was caught by surprise.

Lu Buwei's attacks come one after another like waves upon the shore.

Firstly, he used Lao Ai to tie Zhu Ji down and now he is trying to use Guan Zhongxie to isolate Xiang Shaolong from the royal family altogether.

Lu Buwei did not know their secret and thought that Xiao Pan favours Xiang Shaolong because children love to worship heroes. If Guan Zhongxie can defeat Xiang Shaolong, Xiao Pan will lose interest in him.

He could forecast Lu Buwei arranging a duel between them in front of Xiao Pan. When Xiao Pan personally witnesses his

defeat, Guan Zhongxie will likely replace him in tutoring Xiao Pan.

If Mo Ao is the originator of this scheme, then this man is simply horrendous.

Unconsciously, he looked towards Mo Ao and saw him chatting joyfully with Jing Jun. He is worried that Jing Jun may reveal some secrets unknowingly and prayed hard that Jing Jun is cleverer than he looks.

A series of gongs can be heard approaching the hall.

A group of ten odd musicians came in from the left and began playing.

Everyone stopped talking and enjoyed their performance.

This is the first time Xiang Shaolong saw musicians at dinner banquets since he came to Qin. This is a common sight in the six states but rare in Qin. It appears that Lu Buwei is becoming more and more reckless and even started this culture in Qin.

As everyone is waiting with anticipation, a group of nearly thirty courtesans danced lightly like butterflies into the hall. Full of liveliness and beauty, they gathered at the centre of the hall and began performing according to the music.

These Yan ladies were of average built and dressed in bright flowery colours, showing their excellent curves and astonishing skin. With their gentle expressions and pleasant singing, everyone present was intoxicated by their presence.

Lord Changping and Lord Changwen are hot-blooded young men and were dazed at the sight before them. Remembering Lu Buwei's promise to give them some of the courtesans, they stared hard and try to memorise who are the prettier ones.

Xiang Shaolong hated this practice of using women as gifts. He frowned in silence.

Guan Zhongxie suddenly came to his ear and whispered, "Like you, I hate to see decent women who are treated like slaves. The only thing I can do for them is to keep them in my own room and treat them well!"

Xiang Shaolong was completely blown away and cannot imagine these humane words coming from him. His impression of him greatly improved.

After the dance has ended, the Yan girls divide themselves into two groups and greeted the guests.

The hall was filled with thunderous applause.

They did not take their leave and lined up neatly to be assessed by the men.

Lu Buwei chortled, "People say that the ladies from Yue are the prettiest. Having travelled all around the world, I must say that the ladies of Yan are not inferior too."

The Yan ladies must be virgins as Lu Buwei had mentioned because every one of them became embarrassed immediately.

Tian Dan the expert remarked, "The Qi lady is passionate; the Chu lady knows her fashion; the Yan lady is gentle; the Zhao lady is charming; the Wei lady is elegant, the Han lady has the best figure. This is my frank assessment after personally trying and after discussing with other men."

Lord Changping objected, "Why is there no assessment of the Qin lady?"

Li Yuan joked, "The Qin lady is known for her stubbornness and Chancellor Tian is a guest and dared not say it! But having seen Qin Qing's excessive beauty, I think the ladies of Qin and Yue are the prettiest of all. Who can match the beauty of Official Xiang's wife and the widow Qin Qing?" Finishing, hints of jealousy can be seen on his face.

Guan Zhongxie interrupted, "No wonder Lord Changping has such strong objections. I heard that Lord's sister is an expert swordswoman and her looks are as good as her sword. If it was me, I will speak out for my sister as well."

Lord Changping smiled bitterly, "A Qin lady like her is indeed stubborn. My brother and I have suffered greatly under her hands."

The moment he said these words, everyone at the banquet roared out with laughter.

Xiang Shaolong is reassessing Guan Zhongxie, thinking that this man is more capable than he had imagined. He is very articulate and knows how to win the hearts of others. Compared to Xiao Weimou who only knows how to fight and

Lian Jin who is so cocky, he is way better than them. As a result, Lu Buwei has chosen him to counter himself.

Lu Buwei laughed until he choked, "Prince Dan's generous gift consists of one hundred Yan ladies. After careful selection, I have handpicked the best twenty eight for all of you. You can choose with your eyes blindfolded and still end up with a good catch. After the banquet, I will send them to each of your residences. The Yan ladies, you are dismissed."

The ladies kneeled down and bade farewell before taking their leave.

Lord Changping and the rest finally regained their composure.

Lu Buwei is an easy going man and is very generous to those he is keen to bribe. It is no mystery why his power is growing everyday and he even dared to poison King Zhuangxiang.

After three rounds of drinking, the musicians begin to play again.

Everyone was astounded and did not know what program is coming up next.

Out of a sudden, a cloud of red flew into the hall. Among the flashing swords, a delicate and charming belle was seen. With a sword in each hand, she displayed many enchanting yet difficult sword poses, causing those present to be deeply fascinated.



She was dressed in a yellow and white warrior suit but had a large red cloak on. Awe-inspiring and imposing, she gained everyone's attention in the shortest amount of time.

The cloak was moving quickly like a ball of fire, making her strong fighting spirit even more mesmerizing and captivating.

Her swords flashed relentlessly from her toned arms and were full of life and energy. Even Xiang Shaolong was dazed by her performance.

Guan Zhongxie has an intoxicated look on his face and he watched without blinking.

Using her sword to protect her body, she leapt forward and somersaulted several times, earning loud cheers from the crowd. Her swords flashing again, she suddenly moved towards Xiang Shaolong's and Guan Zhongxie's table.

As everyone is watching with a mixture of fear and amazement, her two swords shot out towards them.

Both men did not make a single move nor did they blink once, allowing the swords to brush past their noses.

The young lady stared fiercely at Xiang Shaolong for a quick second before she kept her swords, saluted and left like the wind.

Xiang Shaolong and Guan Zhongxie exchanged a smile as both of them started to become more suspicious towards each other.

Everyone looked at Lu Buwei and wanted to know who is this pretty lass who can use the sword so well.

Lu Buwei merrily mentioned, "If I have to give this girl away, the receiver will have to be my son-in-law."

Xiang Shaolong recalled the angry look on her face and instantly knew who she is.

She is the Lu Buwei's third daughter Lu Niangrong whom he refused to marry.

After the banquet, Lu Buwei had already sent three Yan courtesans to Wu residence.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi had a quick conference and informed Jing Jun, "Little Jun can choose one of them and must treat her well and not as a slave."

Jing Jun was caught by surprise and nodded in agreement. Before Xiang Shaolong finished speaking, he had slipped out to choose a woman.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi faced each other and smiled bitterly. They thought of Lord Changping and Lord Changwen at the same time. With Lu Buwei's bribery, they will switch sides to support him sooner or later.

To Pu Bu and Liu Chao waiting beside them, Xiang Shaolong instructed, "The other two girls shall belong the two of you. They are helpless ladies and I want you to take care of them for life and give them happiness."

Liu Chao and Pu Bu were surprised as well to gain rare Yan beauties. Originally, they should serve Xiang Shaolong and his wives and it will be long before they get such opportunities. But Xiang Shaolong is a unique master who is fair and generous. Both men are deeply grateful for the gifts.

After settling the girls, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi sat down for a chat.

Teng Yi began, "Guan Zhongxie is a worthy opponent. He will soon gain the respect of the Qin military who worships heroes. Compared to the six states, the people of Qin are more innocent and are easier to deceive."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "From my point of view, I know that he has evil intentions but admired him at the same time. We have finally met our match."

Teng Yi added, "Mo Ao is the dangerous one and kept a low profile. Without Tu Xian's reminder, we will never know that he is such a significant character in the Premier Residence. This kind of hidden enemy is the most frightful. You must not forget your appointment with Tu Xian tomorrow at Phoenix Bridge. I am sure he has some news for us."

Xiang Shaolong nodded to his head to show that he has remembered and state in a deep voice, "We must plan to kill Mo Ao during the hunting fair."

Teng Yi frowned, "Are you sure he will be present?"

Xiang Shaolong affirmed, "This is the best time to network with Xianyang City's royal family as well as the high ranking

officials. Lu Buwei will need him around to assess his opponents and he will be there for sure. Our biggest advantage is that Mo Ao does not know that we are aware about his devious schemes.”

Teng Yi detailed, “Leave this to me. We will begin by examining and analyzing the western wilderness intimately. The people of Jing village are second to none in the forest. As long as we can get Mo Ao to be alone for a short while, we can make it look like he has been bitten by a poisonous snake. Lu Buwei can only blame Heaven for his death.”

Xiang Shaolong was delighted, “We shall do as Second Brother advised.”

Teng Yi had a hurt look on his face, “I feel really guilty about Princess Qian and the maids. As long as I can do something for them, I will sleep better at night.”

They head back to their bedrooms.

Wu Tingfang and the other wives are still awake and waiting for him to come back. Nursed by a nanny, Xiang Bao'er had fallen asleep already.

Xiang Shaolong had been working the whole day and was exhausted. As Tian Zhen and Tian Feng assisted him in changing, Ji Yanran asked in a low voice, “Sister Qin wishes to see you. Can you try to visit her tomorrow? She also hopes that me, Tingfang and Zhi Zhi can stay at her place for a few days.”

Xiang Shaolong shrugged his shoulders” “As long as all of you are agreeable, why not? But I am not sure if I have any free time tomorrow.”

Ji Yanran assured, “Just do your best!”

On the other side, Wu Tingfang commented, “Look! Sister Yanran is in such high spirits today!”

Xiang Shaolong was curious, “What has happened?”

An ecstatic Zhao Zhi replied, “Her godfather sent her an intricate five-string qin (musical instrument) shaped like a banana. Sister Yanran is over the moon!”

Xiang Shaolong was pleased, “Is there news about Mister Zou?”

Ji Yanran blissfully state, “Godfather went to Bashu and visited Lady Hua Yang. He found the scenery to be picturesque and stayed there to focus on his *Teachings of the Five Morals*. Based on his intellect, it will be a great piece of work.”

Wu Tingfang smiled, “When will our Talented Lady write her own book?”

Ji Yanran shot her a look, “I did have that intention but once I met my nemesis Xiang Shaolong, I discovered that my knowledge compared to his was like comparing the glow of the firefly to the glow of the moon. Thus, I gave up that idea! He should be the one who should write a book!”

Xiang Shaolong was guilt-ridden and he led his pretty wives to bed.

That night, he dreamed that he was in the heavenly Bashu and even Qin Qing is with him. Together, they led a peaceful existence without a care in the world.

The dream turned into a nightmare where he saw Zhao Ya who is so sick until she did not look like a human anymore. When he woke up with his body full of sweat, he found out that the sun is already high up in the sky.

## CHAPTER 11

## Each Having Their Own Plots

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHEN Ji Yanran and the ladies set off to Qin Qing's residence, Xiang Shaolong removed Bloodwave, the sword that has never left his side and changed into commoner's clothes. Under the discreet protection of the family warriors, he slipped out of Wu residence and made his way to Phoenix Bridge north of Xianyang City to keep his appointment with Tu Xian.

Since he arrived at Handan City, he has always been mixing with the royalty and upper class. In Xianyang City, he is

leading an even more prestigious lifestyle which is very different from the commoner's way of life. Whenever he wants to do anything, there is someone at his beck and call. Now, he has regained some freedom and has transformed into a common man, enjoying the interesting lifestyle of the man in the street.

He intentionally squeezed his way into the busy business streets and observed the stalls selling various vegetables, goods and art pieces.

Regardless if it is made of steel, bronze, porcelain, wood, leather, cloth or sculptures, everything for sale has an ancient feeling which is not seen in the modern 21st century.

He could not resist buying a few toys to present to his wives and maids to make them happy.

The market is crowded with people and most of them are females. Noticing Xiang Shaolong's sturdy built and handsome looks, they disregard other men and cast their gazes at him frequently.

The young girl selling the bracelet to him kept staring at him with love in her eyes and was smiling sweetly like a blossoming flower.

Xiang Shaolong found it very unique. If it was him years ago when he first came to the ancient times, he would seduce the prettiest girl back home to his bed.

The ladies of Qin are open-minded and straightforward, unlike those in the south-eastern states.



Xiang Shaolong hardened his heart and ignored the young girl's loving gaze. When he turned around, the crowd was becoming chaotic. It seems like several thugs are chasing a young man and are trying to hit him. On the other side, a girl who appears to be his sister or wife is crying as she tries to stop the attackers but was pushed down to the floor instead.

The young man has strong endurance. Despite being overwhelmed, he did not succumb to their attacks and gritted his teeth and continued fighting.

One of the thugs picked up a pole from a stall nearby and was about to hit the young man on his head. Xiang Shaolong leapt in front of the young man and pushed the fiercest thug back a few steps. Spreading his hands, he called, "That's enough! This matter shall end here and no one is allowed to fight anymore. If someone dies, who is accountable?"

The lady took this chance to rush up to the badly bruised young man and cried, "Hubby Zhou! Are you ok?"

Xiang Shaolong realised that this is a young couple and took pity on them.

The group of thugs are rascals who have been terrorizing the common folks. Even though they have caused several stalls to collapse, no one dare to say anything or even blame them for it. Seeing that someone has come to challenge them, they were infuriated and cannot let Xiang Shaolong off. They observed Xiang Shaolong is extremely brave and heroic looking and dared not underestimate him. Picking up poles

and other makeshift weapons, they surrounded Xiang Shaolong.

The leader of the thugs roared, "Who are you? You look like a newcomer and probably has not heard of us, the Ten Tigers of Xianyang. If you know what is good for you, you better kneel down, kowtow to us and admit your mistake or we will give you a good trashing."

Xiang Shaolong rudely stared at him and couldn't be bothered. He turned back to the young couple and smiled, "Is little brother ok?"

Before the young man could answer him, his wife shrieked, "Be careful!"

Xiang Shaolong let out another smile and flipped to one side, snatching the pole that was about to hit his head. At the same time, his leg kicked out into the private region of his attacker.

The thug gave a loud and tragic cry and released his pole. He was sent flying by another kick from Xiang Shaolong and cannot get up anymore.

Grabbing another pole with his other hand, Xiang Shaolong took up a fighting stance and attacked two men simultaneously with his two poles on two sides. He aimed for their ears and fell both men in one stroke. The ear is the human body's most fragile part and their agony is written all over their faces.

The other thugs were scared stiff and dared not attack him. Picking up their fallen comrades, they slipped away quickly into the crowd.

The onlookers clapped loudly to show their appreciation.

Xiang Shaolong has an appointment to keep and cannot stay around for too long. From his bosom, he retrieved enough silver to buy several horses and pushed them into the hands of the young man and sincerely advised, "Find a physician to treat your injuries and leave quickly before those men come back!"

The young man firmly rejected, "I did not do anything to deserve this money. Mister has helped me greatly and how can I receive your kindness once again?"

His wife nodded her head vigorously, showing her strong approval of her husband's decision.

Xiang Shaolong is secretly joyful and gently asked, "If it was me that was in trouble and you are wealthy. Would you have done the same thing?"

The young man named Zhou replied, "Of course!"

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "So be it!" Stuffing the silver into his hands, he left laughing.

Among the cheering of the crowd, he hurriedly left the market. Just as he was about to cross a wide street, someone called him from behind, "Mister, please hold your step!"

Xiang Shaolong turned around in surprise and saw a stocky man approaching him. This man is neatly dressed with a long sword at his waist and appears to be a family warrior. The man invited, "Mister's action has been witnessed by my Young Mistress who happened to be passing by. She admires your character and wishes to meet you."

Xiang Shaolong was very amused but looking at his fine bearing, he must have come from a prestigious family. He politely rejected, "I am a born wanderer and aspires to fly everywhere like the wild geese. Please tell your mistress that I am grateful for her appreciation."

Finishing, he left.

The family warrior repeated 'fly everywhere like the wild geese', the refreshing new proverb a few times before he left dejectedly.

Tu Xian led Xiang Shaolong to a simple and inconspicuous hut near the bridge and declared, "I have specially arranged this place for our rendezvous. If we have to meet up in future, this will be the place!"

Xiang Shaolong knew that he is very experienced and will make this safe house undetected by Lu Buwei and his cronies. He sat down and inquired, "How is Lu Buwei treating Brother Tu?"

Tu Xian plainly state, "There are many things he still needs my help. Especially those that he wishes to keep confidential. For example, it was me who extorted the bunch of Yan courtesans from Prince Dan. Originally, Prince Dan

wanted to give them to the influential people in Xianyang City as bribes but Lu Buwei learnt about this. He hinted to me and got me to be the bad person and extort these girls. I even have to pretend that this issue has nothing to do with him. Isn't it hilarious?"

Xiang Shaolong is slightly amused and felt less hatred for this man. He recollected that he will send assassins after Xiao Pan in the future. The assassination will fail and his state will be annihilated. He will eventually become another pitiful soul.

Of course! Prince Dan can never guess that his future is so tragic.

Tu Xian voice sounded in his ear, "There is news of Yuetan!"

Xiang Shaolong is rejuvenated by this news and happily asked, "Where is Brother Xiao now?"

Tu Xian disclosed, "He has changed his identity and is currently an attendant in Han's Lord Nan Liang's residence. I have sent someone to give him fifty taels of gold. Han is not a good place to stay for long."

Xiang Shaolong agreed, "If Qin wants to attack the east, the first point of contention is Changping and Han will be in great danger with their minimum resistance."

Tu Xian smiled, "Han may be weak but still have some tricks up their sleeves. You should know about this man called Zhengguo. This man is not as simple as he looks."

For a while, Xiang Shaolong did not know who he was talking about. He suddenly remembered Zhengguo is the water engineer from Han who is trying to build a canal linking River Jing and River Luo, irrigating the land between them. Startled, he asked, "Is there a problem?"

Tu Xian explained, "I have met this man and he is very gifted. The King of Han treats him very well and his loyalty to Han is without question. When he came to Lu Buwei with his plan, I thought that he is here to assassinate him and purposely did not remind that traitor. Amazingly, the fella really has a grand plan to build the canal and knows every single process. Mo Ao knew that this will increase Lu Buwei's influence and encouraged him. Thus, Zhengguo's canal plan is born."

Xiang Shaolong still did not comprehend, "Since this is the case, Lu Buwei will only stand to benefit without any losses."

Tu Xian analyzed, "This may be beneficial to Lu Buwei and Qin but is bad for any eastern campaign. Such a canal will need several years and millions of manpower to build. With this burden, Qin will not have any more resources to conquer the east. The most they can conquer is a few plots of land around Changping! Zhengguo's strategy is indeed top-notch!"

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened. Although he is from the elite special commando unit, he is not someone who wants to look for trouble. All these infighting before Xiao Pan's coronation may not be a bad thing after all!

He nodded, "So Master Tu summoned me here is to update me on these two issues."

Tu Xian seriously commented, "Of course it is not over such small matters. Lu Buwei has plotted to kill you during the hunting fair. Wu Tingwei's disappearance has raised his suspicions. He knows that you and him are irreconcilable like fire and water, and can never work together again. Unless you marry Lu Niangrong as a form of submission, Lu Buwei will not allow you, his scourge, to remain alive. There is no one who knows how capable you are other than him."

Xiang Shaolong had a narrow escape. When Lu Buwei spoke so politely to him yesterday, cleared up their misunderstanding and even gave him Yan courtesans is to make him lessen his guard and not take any precautions against him. He was nearly tricked!

He bitterly laughed, "What a coincidence! I planned to kill Mo Ao during the hunting fair too."

Tu Xian smiled, "I knew you will not bend to his will. Shaolong is right on target. If you get rid of this man, it is as good as breaking one of Lu Buwei's limbs."

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "How did Brother Tu come to know these secrets?"

Tu Xian proudly boasts, "There are still many tasks that have to go through my men. They would never guess that I know the truth behind the red pine forest attack and that I have been serving them loyally over such a long time but is now

working with outsiders. With my additional information, I can easily see through their schemes.”

Xiang Shaolong nodded, “If we can know how they are trying to kill me, I can turn the tables on them.”

Tu Xian shook his head, “This matter is planned by Mo Ao and Guan Zhongxie and I do not have the details. Guan Zhongxie is desperate to kill you. First, he can replace you and secondly, he did not want his dream girl Lu Nianrong to marry you. If he can become Lu Buwei’s son-in-law, his reputation will grow drastically.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed, “He is trying too hard. You should have seen the hatred in her eyes last night.”

Tu Xian laughed, “Women are strange creatures. Initially, she did not want to marry you. When you rejected the marriage proposal, she begins to notice you. Whether is it love, hatred or spite, she has a different attitude towards you. She was the one who suggested the swordplay performance to Lu Buwei. I believe she wants to show you how enthralling she is and make you regret your decision.”

Xiang Shaolong did not know whether to laugh or cry, sighing, “I will rather kill myself than to marry my arch-enemy’s daughter.”

Tu Xian smiled, “Lu Nianrong is apple of Lu Buwei’s eyes. If Crown Prince Zheng is really not his son, he would have arranged for their marriage.”



Glancing at Xiang Shaolong's questioning gaze, Tu Xian shrugged his shoulders, "Don't ask me who the real father of Crown Prince is. I think even Zhu Ji does not know. When she got pregnant, she was sleeping with both of them."

Xiang Shaolong laughed secretly. In the whole world, only he, Teng Yi and Wu Tingfang knew Xiao Pan's real identity.

The moment Xiang Shaolong stepped into the Cavalry Command Centre, he received word that the Crown Prince wishes to see him. He rushed to the palace immediately. Dressed in long robes of the King of Qin, Xiao Pan is having a secret discussion with Li Si in the study room.

Seeing him, Xiao Pan mentioned, "General's words have a great effect on Lao Ai. This morning, Empress told me that this man is a rare talent and should be utilised well, asking me to give him a promotion. Needless to say, Empress is besotted with him and must reward him for his efforts."

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself, knowing that Zhu Ji has degenerated to the point of no return.

But he could not bear to blame her. This beauty has always been grateful towards her benefactors or she will not tolerate Lu Buwei's evil acts. King Zhuangxiang's death is a heavy blow to her, making her a traumatized and confused woman. She has lost her usual sanity and felt that life is empty. Moreover, she has been rejected by him. Under such circumstances, Lao Ai the Casanova is able to make use of this opening to win her affections.

She needs the pleasure of the flesh to compensate for her sufferings!

Xiao Pan sighed, "This fellow is so impatient. After a few days as an attendant, he is already asking for a promotion. Li Si and I were discussing what official post to give him!"

Finishing, his mouth curled up in a smile.

Li Si who has become Xiao Pan's confidante suggested, "From my point of view, we can give him such a high post that it will incur Lu Buwei's jealousy. If we can make Lu Buwei object to this promotion, it will be even better. That will strengthen Lao Ai's determination to break away from Lu Buwei."

Xiang Shaolong finally managed to sit down and laughed, "I am afraid even with the cleverest people guessing, they can never guess that we are discussing such nonsense with the Crown Prince. Hei! Is there any post that will be in open conflict with Lu Buwei or one of Lu Buwei's cronies?"

Li Si had a brainwave, "Why don't we promote him to be the Inner Custodian? This post is related to the Imperial Cavalry and Imperial Infantry. Documents from the Imperial Cavalry and Infantry must be vetted by the Inner Custodian before it can be submitted to the King. This is a position of authority and is almost like a supervisor of the Imperial Army."

Xiao Pan frowned, "But this post is occupied by Teng Sheng. This man has shown real ability and is respected by the military. If we displace him, the generals may protest."

Li Si suggested, "Crown Prince can promote him to another higher post to reassure the military."

Xiao Pan thought deeper and remarked, "The most important post in the palace is the Commander of the Palace Guards which is held by Lord Changping and Lord Changwen. Below them is Subject Li who is the Imperial Librarian who is in charge of all documentation. The next in power will be the Inner Custodian. The remaining positions are those concerning the hunting fair, the ceremonial officials, the banquet officials but these positions are ranked much lower. I cannot think of an ideal position that will satisfy Teng Sheng."

Xiang Shaolong did not say anything as he is completely ignorant about palace rankings.

But after he has heard all their discussions, he remembered Justice Bao and had a brainwave, "Since there is an Inner Custodian, there should be an Outer Custodian as well! This new official shall be the eyes and ears of Palace and be responsible for gathering information outside the palace. If there are any suspicious activities, he must report it to Crown Prince immediately. This is a challenging and refreshing job which should make Teng Sheng happy and excited."

Xiao Pan slapped the armrest exclaiming, "Great idea! The Empress will support this idea and Lu Buwei cannot intervene. But I do hope he will still voice out his objections."

Li Si praised, "Official Xiang is creative and thinks out of the box. I am impressed."

Xiang Shaolong added, "It will be good to give Lao Ai an office in the palace. He can use the office to plan his schemes and hold meetings for his cronies. Soon, he will be Lu Buwei's opponent."

Xiao Pan joked, "Let's find a place opposite the new Premier Residence, since they are going to be opponents, their residences should be opposing each other too."

Everyone roared out in laughter.

Lu Buwei will be burnt for playing with fire. He wanted to use Lao Ai to control Zhu Ji but now, Zhu Ji has 'switched sides' and cultivated a new adversary against him.

An attendant came to report that Grand Tutor Qin is here and is waiting outside.

Xiao Pan's face shone with happiness and instructed Li Si and the attendant to leave first. When they have left, he stood up and confided in Xiang Shaolong, "I don't know why but after His Majesty has passed away, I especially love to see Grand Tutor Qin. Watching her calm expression and peaceful demeanour, I feel extremely comfortable, even with her occasional scolding. In the past, I never had this feeling before."

He added softly, "Except for Master and Grand Tutor Qin, nobody dares to scold me. The late king and Empress never scold me."

Xiang Shaolong could not hold back and hugged him tightly, sighing, "Dear Child! It is because you needed a respectable motherly figure like Lady Ni."

Xiao Pan trembled strongly and his eyes reddened, leaning into Xiang Shaolong's bosom like a little boy hiding in his father's protective arms.

Xiang Shaolong understood his behaviour. Ever since he became Yingzheng, this poor orphan began to treat King Zhuangxiang and Zhu Ji like his natural parents, especially doting on Zhu Ji. With King Zhuangxiang's death, his beautiful dream is shattered.

Zhu Ji is a realistic woman who will not fall out with Lu Buwei over King Zhuangxiang's death. With Lao Ai entering the picture, Xiao Pan knows that Zhu Ji can never replace his stern but righteous birth mother Lady Ni.

And Qin Qing has unconsciously become the closest idea of being his mother.

Xiang Shaolong is also saddened about Zhao Ni. In a low voice, he instructed, "When you have regained your composure, go out at once for your lesson."

Xiao Pan forcefully nodded his head.

Xiang Shaolong released him and left.

## CHAPTER 12

## Heartbroken Over A Silk Painting

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

PASSING through the corridor, he came to the outer hall and saw Qin Qing's beautiful figure standing right in front of the window. She is staring at the garden beyond the window and seems to be thinking about something.

Xiang Shaolong could not resist going up to her back and softly asked, "A penny for your thoughts?"

Qin Qing must have predicted that he will past by and wasn't surprised at all. She did not turn around but plainly state, "Is Grand Tutor Xiang interested to find out?"

Based on these words, Xiang Shaolong affirms that she has feelings for him as these words have crossed the line on an ordinary conversation. Moreover, she is someone who is not into relationships, making it even more striking.

Xiang Shaolong is stunned and wanted to cower back but he likes her special attention towards him. Summoning his courage, he answered, "Hei! If I am not interested, I would not have asked in the first place."

Qin Qing turned her slender frame around and her icy face is just an arm's length away from Xiang Shaolong's own face. Her eyes shining sharply, she simply remarked, "I am thinking, if Official Xiang knows that I am here, would he take a detour and avoid me?"

Xiang Shaolong could not take it anymore and dryly laughed, "Grand Tutor is thinking too much. Oh! Have you seen Yanran and the rest?"

This strong-willed woman refused to back down and scolded, "Don't change the subject. The people I hate the most are the traitors who bring harm to the King. The other types of people I also hate are those who have a high opinion about themselves, pretending to protect women but actually regard women like us to be nothing more than goods. Have I wronged you?"

Xiang Shaolong had a taste of her temper before and bitterly laughed, "It seems that I am not any better than Lu Buwei. Ai! I have apologised to you already and only made a

mistake by advising you to accompany Lady Hua Yang in Bashu! Until now, you are still unwilling to let me off?"

Due to Xiang Shaolong, Qin Qing may have cultivated a new habit, which is to maintain her icy expression but wanted to laugh out at the same time. Finally, she gave up and burst into giggles and her cold expression begin to thaw. She viciously shot him a look and declared, "Yes! I am dissatisfied. And I will never forgive you!"

This is the first time she is flirting with him. Xiang Shaolong's heart warmed up and was about to retort when footsteps were heard.

Both of them knew that the Crown Prince has arrived and quickly parted.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly bade her farewell but Qin Qing's teasing expression has been engraved into his heart forever.

Under the protection of the Eighteen Guardians, Xiang Shaolong rode towards the outer palace. Coincidentally, he ran into Lord Changping who is deploying the palace guards guarding the palace gates. Lord Changping pulled him aside and whispered, "The Yan ladies are really something!"

Xiang Shaolong could only mumble a reply.

Lord Changping is young and curious, asking, "Premier Lu's third daughter is delicate-looking and well-skilled with the sword. When I woke up this morning, her performance is still fresh in my memory. Hei! How is she related to you? Why did she test your reaction with that stance?"



Xiang Shaolong felt extremely intimate, as if he is chatting with his army buddies in the 21st century. Their conversations will be filled with women, fighting and curses at the instructors. He smiled, "I think that this is called a large tree attracts the most wind!"

Lord Changping chortled, "Well said. Your newly created proverb suits you very well. My stubborn sister has come to know about our friendship and demanded that we bring you home to meet her."

Xiang Shaolong can feel a headache coming, "Can we talk about this later? You know that I have many things to attend to."

Lord Changping smiled, "You cannot escape from her grasp. Just show her a few strokes and make her happy on account of our friendship. Otherwise, she will give you a hard time during the hunting fair."

Xiang Shaolong was startled, "She is taking part as well?"

Lord Changping replied, "It is her big day! She will lead her female army in a grand and imposing parade."

Xiang Shaolong was swept off his feet, exclaiming, "Female army!"

Lord Changping sighed, "It is an army of aggressive ladies just like my sister. Normally, they will look for expert swordsmen to compete their sword fighting skills. Even Wang Jian is terrified of them. Personally, I think this is the main reason he slipped off to guard the Northern Border. If

not for the fact that you are at the farms most of the time, you will not be spared too.”

Xiang Shaolong finally understood and burst out in guffaws. Lord Changping added, “An Gu is leaving tomorrow to guard the eastern Passes. We have always been on good terms and will organize a farewell dinner tonight. Why don’t you come along too and humour sister Ying Ying?”

Xiang Shaolong has always like Lord Changping for he does not put on any airs and is easy to get along with. Moreover, it is An Gu’s farewell dinner. He consented immediately.

Lord Changping is pleased and left him.

Back at the Command Centre, he was detained by Jing Jun. Jing Jun excitedly reported, “There are three things! Ah!” He yawned.

Xiang Shaolong stared at him, asking, “You have been busy the whole night?”

Jing Jun nonchalantly replied, “As Third Brother instructed, I spent half a night chatting and coaxing her and the other half indulging her. That’s why I am so tired.”

Xiang Shaolong was tongue tied and did not know how to advise him. Embarrassed, he asked, “What are the three things?”

Awkwardly, Jing Jun began, “First, the three sister-in-laws mentioned that if you can afford the time, please join them for lunch at Qin Qing’s residence. Xiang Bao’er misses you too. I would suggest you spend the night there with them.”

Xiang Shaolong glared at him, "Little Jun, why are you such a busybody today?"

Jing Jun modestly answered, "I will not have the guts. But I noticed that Third Brother has been smiling more and could not help but pay more attention to you."

Finishing, his eyes became red and he lowered his head.

Xiang Shaolong can feel the deep brotherly love that exists between them. Hugging him by his shoulder, he kept quiet.

It may be due to King Zhuangxiang's death that he gathered his courage and fighting spirit, pushing the sad memories of Zhao Qian's and the maids' deaths out of his daily thoughts.

After all, everything happened more than a year ago.

Jing Jun reported, "The other two matters are Lord Longyang is waiting for you in the main hall and Tian Dan have sent someone to summon you urgently to his guesthouse."

Xiang Shaolong was puzzled.

Why is Tian Dan looking for him?

Based on his wide network of spies, he should know about Lu Buwei's enmity with himself. If he wants to stay in Lu Buwei's good books, he should avoid him instead.

Thinking about this, his heart began to beat wildly.

After he sat down with Lord Longyang in a resting room, Lord Longyang congratulated, "My heartiest congratulations to Brother Xiang for being promoted to be the powerful Imperial Cavalry Commander."

His face darkened and he added, "Thinking that we have to face each other in the battlefield one day, I am really filled with dread. Why is life filled with so many things beyond our control?"

Xiang Shaolong sincerely state, "Relax! I will do my best to avoid such a situation from happening. In these turbulent times, even parents fight their children and brothers fight among themselves. Lord must be more open-minded."

Lord Longyang emotionally commented, "Back in the past at Daliang, we were as irreconcilable as water and fire. Now, Shaolong is my true and best friend. I will be leaving tomorrow and we may never meet again. I am tormented and agonized at such a separation."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "Lord is not participating in the hunting fair?"

Lord Longyang's eyes shone with a murderous look. Unhappily, he replied, "Lu Buwei is openly working with Qi and Chu against the allied states. Why would I spend more time here and receive more cold treatment? I am not so foolish."

Xiang Shaolong knew this is the truth as well and did not bother to pacify him. He recollected Zhengguo's canal project and disclosed, "Lord need not worry for the time being. For the next eight to ten years, Qin will be unable to mount an eastern campaign. As long as everyone continues to work together, this should be a peaceful period. At the most, you will lose small pieces of territory!"

Lord Longyang's eyes shone sharply and inquired, "What makes Shaolong say so?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed and told him everything about Zhengguo Canal.

Lord Longyang was extremely moved, "Shaolong actually told me such a big secret. I will keep it confidential even from my King to show my gratitude."

He realised, "No wonder Han Chuang is so confident and flamboyant. I was worried till I cannot eat or drink but he is partying and visiting the courtesans every night. So this is the reason."

He lowered his voice, "Why don't Shaolong remind the Crown Prince and score a big merit. It will also underscore Lu Buwei's influence."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "I do not want Qin to attack Daliang so quickly!"

Lord Longyang was deep in thoughts for a while and added, "There is something I initially did not want to tell you but I am touched by your kindness and will feel guilty if I continue to hide it from you."

He gritted his teeth, disclosing, "Han Jing (Zhao's Empress Jing) that bitch does not look at the big picture and I need not help her keep this secret."

Xiang Shaolong was astonished, "What is it?"

Lord Longyang replied in a deep voice, "You have met Pang Nuan (Junyu). He is the spokesman and confidante of Han Jing. Not only is he a devious schemer, he is very articulate as well. This time, he came to Qin with ulterior motives. Recently, he has been in constant contact with Lord Gaoling Yinghou. You should know better than me that something is afoot!"

Lord Gaoling is the prince who was overridden by King Zhuangxiang to be the new King of Qin. All along, he has been dissatisfied and has the intention to rebel. Unexpectedly, he is in cahoots with Zhao.

Xiang Shaolong understood that since Lord Longyang knew about Han's scheming and put aside his worry about Qin's attack, the next person he hated is Zhao's Empress Han Jing and took this chance to backstab her. If Pang Nuan died in Xianyang City, Han Jing will be devastated.

Politics is dirty and complicated. People fight openly and also secretly. Among all the various schemes, no one will know the clear winner until the end.

Although this has no effect on Xiang Shaolong who knows the ending, personal fights and schemes are still unknown to him. For example, he still does not know if he will be killed by Lu Buwei.

Xiang Shaolong thought for a while and enquired, "Tian Dan wishes to see me; does Lord know the reason behind this?"

Lord Longyang was surprised, "Is that so? From my observations, Lu Buwei and Tian Dan must have a secret

agreement. They are likely to follow the Eastern and Western Emperors example, with the allied states belonging to Qin and Yan belonging to Qi. Although they know that they are deceiving each other, there are advantages to both parties in the short term. Now, they are best buddies. I really have no idea why Tian Dan is looking for you.”

Xiang Shaolong is sure that Lord Longyang is as puzzled as him. Ending their conversation, he sent him out of the Command Centre personally. Under the escort of the Eighteen Guardians, he went to see Tian Dan.

The guesthouse is heavily guarded.

Dan Chu welcomed him at the main door and has a serious expression on his face. He only exchanged some courtesy words.

When he brought him into Tian Dan’s inner chamber, this Chancellor of Qi is playing a tune on the ancient qin instrument.

Like waves hitting endlessly upon the shore, the ‘Male Immortal’ piece he was playing filled the entire hall with music.

The Liu brothers who never left his side were staring at Xiang Shaolong menacingly.

Dan Chu retreated a few steps but did not leave the room.

Xiang Shaolong knew that this is inappropriate but no matter how daring Tian Dan is, he dared not assassinate him in Xianyang City.

But if Tian Dan has the support of Lu Buwei to kill him, the Eighteen Guardians and himself will perish in this guesthouse.

Tian Dan suddenly stopped playing and laughed, "How is Dong Horse Fanatic?"

He stood up and faced him, his eyes shining sharp like an eagle's eyes.

Xiang Shaolong knows that he cannot hide his identity for long but is certain that Tian Dan is not fully confident of this truth. Thus, Tian Dan is trying to trick him with this sentence.

No matter how intimate Tian Dan is to Lu Buwei, Lu Buwei will not be so foolish to tell him this secret. After all, everything is planned by Lu Buwei, causing Tian Dan's scheme to fail, his army suffering losses and returning to Qi in disgrace.

He feigned surprise and replied, "I do not know what Chancellor Tian is talking about."

Tian Dan confidently walked over towards him. When he is pretty close, he challenged, "The earth-shattering Xiang Shaolong did not dare to admit his past actions? You may have deceived others but you can never deceive me!"

The corners of his mouth curled up in a devious smile and he gestured with his right hand, adding, "Let me show you something interesting."



Dan Chu reacted to his gesture and came between them. From his bosom, he retrieved a silk drawing and spread it open.

At the same time, the Liu Brothers came forward to Tian Dan's sides and strike a defensive posture in case there is an attack from Xiang Shaolong.

The atmosphere became very tense.

When Xiang Shaolong glanced at the drawing, his limbs turned cold and his whole body shook uncontrollably, as if he has fallen into a ice lake.

On the silk painting was someone who looks similar to Shan Rou, except for the eyes. The person in the painting has weak looking eyes unlike the determined eyes of Shan Rou.

Tian Dan coldly laughed, "Needless to say, Brother Xiang should know this lady. She came to assassinate me and was captured by me. I believe she was once the wife of Dong Horse Fanatic. Does Brother Xiang still want to deny?"

Xiang Shaolong is at a disadvantageous position and is feeling tremendously uncomfortable. Thinking that Shan Rou is in his hands, he has lost his bearings and cannot think properly.

Tian Dan plainly state, "It is only a woman and I can give her back to you anytime. As long as Brother Xiang can do something for me, this woman will return back into your arms."

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization and figured out the problem that bothering him.

His heart was filled with utmost grief.

He knew that Shan Rou has failed to assassinate Tian Dan and committed suicide. That is why the artist cannot paint her eyes with the determined look.

With his eyes glowing with hatred, he roared, "You need not speak further. If you, Tian Dan, can return back to Qi alive, I will write my name in inversely."

As the four men were flabbergasted, Xiang Shaolong left with a pained expression.

Finally, he has a reason to kill Tian Dan.

# VOLUME 13

## CHAPTER 1

### Prince Dan From Yan

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

AFTER Teng Yi finished listening, he was dazed like a wooden figure and was speechless for some time.

With her around, everyone has to withstand her tantrums; without her around, everyone is pining for her return.

Unexpectedly, she met with a tragic ending.

Shan Rou is a rare person during these ancient times to stand up for female rights. She is strong, brave and determined. As long as she sets her sights on something, she will do her utmost best to accomplish it. And she has now sacrificed her life to achieve her biggest dream!

With both his hands supporting his face, Xiang Shaolong is tearing quietly.

An attendant came in to report something but was chased away by Teng Yi. He instructed the Guardians not to allow anyone to disturb them.

Teng Yi reached out and patted Xiang Shaolong's shoulder, speaking out in a sorrowful voice, "The dead cannot be returned to life. Our most important task presently is to take revenge for her. She is considered my relative so it is two strong reasons we must kill him for sure!"

When Xiang Shaolong has somewhat calmed down, Teng Yi asked, "Do you think Tian Dan will report you to Lu Buwei or Crown Prince? After all, it is widely accepted that emissaries should not be killed. Qin cannot just watch you kill Tian Dan within their territory."

Xiang Shaolong give a pained reply, "It may be Shan Rou's divine intervention. Whenever I think of her committing

suicide, my mind becomes extremely clear and can identify all the issues.”

Pausing, he continued, “Even if Qin sends soldiers to escort Tian Dan home, it is limited to Qin territory. Once they left Qin’s border, it will be time to act but we must first find out the strength of his army and whether there is anyone receiving him outside Qin. I must speak to Lord Longyang. He can definitely provide me with some information.”

After thinking, he sighed, “Tian Dan can be considered isolated from the rest since he did not participate in the combined army. He conspired against King Xiaocheng on his last trip and the people of Zhao hates him to the core. Han is on good terms with Zhao’s Empress Han Jing and will not make it easy for him. Under such circumstances, the only way home is to go through Wei or Chu. Wei is much nearer but is not as safe as Chu. If I am not mistaken, he will travel with Li Yuan. Thus, we can more or less know his travelling route.”

Teng Yi was startled, “If he is protected by the Qin army in Qin and the Chu army in Chu, when is a good time to kill him?”

Xiang Shaolong revealed an icy cold smile and plainly state, “For Shan Rou and Second Brother’s revenge, I will do whatever I can to kill this evildoer. First, we must force Li Yuan to leave Xianyang City. Tian Dan cannot leave without finishing his discussion with Lu Buwei.”

Teng Yi frowned, "Let's talk about forcing Li Yuan later; how did you know that Lu Buwei and Tian Dan are still in discussion?"

Xiang Shaolong answered, "It is called intuition. Last night, they are busy whispering into each other's ears. In addition, he used Shan Rou to blackmail me to do something for him. These are all signs that they are still in discussion. It is useless to continue talking without facts. Let's get moving. Second Brother shall investigate Tian Dan's army strength while I look for Lord Longyang and Prince Dan. I may learn something useful from them."

Teng Yi was stunned, "Prince Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "Within Xianyang City, there is no one more concerned about Tian Dan's life and death other than him."

He softly added, "Send someone to inform Zhi Zhi that I do not have any free time today."

At the same time, he swore that he will never tell Zhao Zhi that Shan Rou has come to harm.

Lord Longyang is delighted to see Xiang Shaolong again. Leading him into a scheduled eastern room within his guesthouse, he listened to his account and consoled him, saying it that there is no point crying over spilt milk. The conversation turning serious, he explained, "There is a horse plague in Qi and I think he wants a few thousand warhorses from you! Naturally, he will not ask you to make trouble for Lu Buwei. In fact, he is more concerned about Lu Buwei than

the Qin people. Just by looking at Lu Buwei's political and military successes within a few years, anyone can tell that he is formidable. If Qin falls under his control, all his opponents will suffer greatly."

Xiang Shaolong asked in a deep voice, "Will Lord disapprove of my killing of Tian Dan?"

Lord Longyang shook his head, "Not only will I not disapprove, I am exhilarated! You are right. Tian Dan will return to Qi via Chu and he has an army of ten thousand soldiers, led by his trusted general Tian Rong, waiting there for him. You must kill him before he meets up with them. Except for Qin, our next greatest threat is Qi. If Tian Dan is killed, everyone in the allied states will be overjoyed. He alone did not participate in the last battle and has incurred everyone's wrath. Obviously, he is trying to benefit from our losses."

Sighing, he added, "It is a pity most of our soldiers are based at the Qin-Wei border and cannot assist you. Moreover, the King may not agree. But I can always send spies to investigate the deployments of the Qi and Chu armies. Their reports are guaranteed to be accurate."

Xiang Shaolong is grateful, "That will help a lot. I am sure that with my present forces, I can make him die a terrible death. How many men did Tian Dan bring on this trip?"

Lord Longyang detailed, "He has a few hundred men within the City. Outside the city is another elite army of one thousand Qi cavalry. With Li Yuan's forces, their army

strength will exceed three thousand. Shaolong must not underestimate them, especially when you are attacking them outside of Qin. If you make a serious mistake, you may be killed by him instead.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Of course I know that he is a powerful foe but I have some tricks that are beyond his imagination.”

Lord Longyang can never guess that he is referring to his 21st Century warfare and strategies. Thinking that he has a large army too, he inquired, “Shaolong has official work to attend to; can you leave for a few months?”

It is hard to explain the special relationship between Crown Prince and himself.

Xiang Shaolong simply sighed, “I have my methods.”

After deciding on future communication methods, Xiang Shaolong bade his farewell and left Jifeng and the Guardians at Lord Longyang’s courtyard, walking over to Prince Dan’s guesthouse next door. After he reported his name, Prince Dan came out personally to receive him with a few escorts.

Temporary putting aside his hatred regarding Xu Yiluan’s double ambush, he greeted, “How are you doing, Prince Dan? Please forgive me for taking such a long time before paying my respects to you.”

Staring at him, he was reminded about Jing Ke.

Without Jing Ke, he would never know of this man called Prince Dan.



The vibrant looking Prince Dan happily greeted, “General Xiang is an important military figure. I had wanted to visit you but am afraid that General is busy with his new duties and dare not interrupt. I planned to visit you after the hunting fair but since General is here, I welcome you with open arms.”

Moving forward, he grabbed his hand and whispered, “Honestly, I am so jealous that the stunningly attractive Talented Lady Ji is your wife.”

Finishing, they broke out in laughter.

In the midst of his laughter, Xiang Shaolong could start to understand why Jing Ke is willing to assassinate Qin Shihuang for him.

These legendary men all possess extraordinary abilities.

Prince Dan began introducing his men to Xiang Shaolong.

There are three men who left an impression on him. First, it is Physician Leng Ting. This man is around forty years old with delicate features and eyes that shine with wisdom. He is rather tall, just two inches shorter than Xiang Shaolong, and has long and agile limbs. He is a man of few words but Xiang Shaolong is sure that this man has both brains and brawns.

Next is General Xu Yize. From his name, he must be Xu Yiluan’s brother. Around thirty years old, he is short and stout with a giant head. He has a figure that resembles a

wrestler in unarmed combat. He has a serious look on his face that makes it hard for people to confide in him.

The last gentleman named You Zhi is a handsome man who is a few years older than Prince Dan. He carries an intimate smile on his face and leaves a good impression on everyone he meets. The moment Xiang Shaolong saw him, he is certain that this man is Prince Dan's chief strategist.

After the usual pleasantries, Prince Dan led him into the main hall.

After everyone got seated, two ladies even prettier than Lu Buwei's courtesans came forward and served tea.

Accompanying them are the three men as well as two generals Yan Chuang and Yan Jun who are related to the royal family. The remainder of the guards remained in the outer hall.

Xiang Shaolong took a sip from his tea cup and went straight to the point, "I wish to speak to Prince in secret."

Prince Dan is slightly startled and dismissed the two ladies. He sincerely assured, "These men are my most trusted subordinates. Regardless of what General Xiang wishes to say, you may say it in front of these men."

Xiang Shaolong secretly praised Prince Dan for his strong trust in his men. Under the scrutiny of the six pairs of eyes, he casually state, "I want to kill Tian Dan!"

Everyone including Prince Dan is stunned. Only You Zhi remains calm and aloof.

Xiang Shaolong stared at Prince Dan, examining his reaction.

Prince Dan's eyes shone sharply and exchanged a glance with him. Recovering from his shock, he asked, "I am not surprised to know that General has such an intention but why are you specially telling me about it?"

Xiang Shaolong energetic eyes scanned everyone before him and slowly declare, "Before I explain, let me first bury the hatchet over Xu Yiluan's double ambush. We shall work sincerely from today onwards and do not keep any secrets from each other."

With these earth-shattering words, even the collected You Zhi lost his composure. The others naturally reacted even stronger than before.

Prince Dan will now know that Dong Kuang and Xiang Shaolong are actually the same person.

There is a strange feeling in the air.

After a long while, Prince Dan let out a long sigh. Standing up, he bowed and apologised, "Brother Xiang, please excuse me. To save my country, I have done many things against my conscience."

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly got up to return his courtesy, congratulating himself for choosing the right partner. If Prince Dan denied everything, he need not bother himself with this man anymore.

Both men got seated and the atmosphere is much friendlier.

Leng Ting's eyes shone with appreciation and nodded, "I finally understood how General can triumph in Wei and Zhao, and even counter Lu Buwei in Qin."

You Zhi plainly state, "Does General Xiang know that killing Tian Dan is more difficult than ascending to heaven? Moreover, you should know your status as a general of Qin."

Xiang Shaolong knew that he is testing his background. If he wanted to hide in Qin while asking them to kill Tian Dan, these six men will despise him.

At the end of the day, this is a business deal. The success of the plan is dependent on the potential benefits.

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "Li Yuan and Tian Dan are committing atrocities all over the country. Li Yuan used his sister Li Yan Yan to give birth to the Crown Prince. If King Xiaolie dies, the newcomer Li Yuan will need to borrow Qi's forces to counter the incumbent Lord Chunshen. Tian Dan needs Li Yuan's assistance to attack the allied states and expand his territory. When fighting against Tian Dan, we must not neglect Li Yuan. Regarding the Qin military, I have my ways of dealing with them as long as it does not involved Lu Buwei. Everyone can rest easy."

Prince Dan let out another long sigh, "I finally tasted Brother Xiang's formidability. Since you are so knowledgeable about every state, I will not waste any more words. May I ask how Brother Xiang plans to solve the problem regarding Chu? If Tian Dan and Li Yuan travel together, their strength would increase drastically. When they are nearing Chu, they will be

received by both their armies. There is no way we can intercept them. We have such an intention as well but it is an impossible task.”

Xiang Shaolong smiled mysteriously and official state, “Leave Li Yuan to me. I will make him leave Qin before the hunting fair, disrupting their travel plans. Li Yuan has always been a selfish man. If he is in deep trouble himself, he will not be bothered about Tian Dan.”

Everyone was confused.

Xu Yize could not help but asked, “What clever scheme does General Xiang has?”

Xiang Shaolong spontaneously replied, “Please let me keep this little secret to myself. You will see results within these two days. If I cannot even accomplish such a small matter, I will be too ashamed to face everyone again.”

Prince Dan concluded, “Great! Xiang Shaolong is worthy of his reputation. If Li Yuan leave Qin before the hunting fair, I will do my best and cooperate with you. Tian Dan that traitor will not return to Qi alive!”

Xiang Shaolong had expected this agreement.

Qi and Yan are neighbours and have always been irreconcilable like water and fire, eyeing each other’s territory. Yan had invaded Qi but was repelled by Tian Dan, causing heavy losses to Yan. Everyone in Yan hated Tian Dan to the core and would not hesitate for an opportunity to kill him.

To them, Li Yuan plays a crucial role. If Li Yuan is killed too, it is equivalent to offending two states that are stronger than Yan and it is not something to laugh about.

But if they can ignore Chu's issue and even push the blame to Xiang Shaolong, it will be even better.

Xiang Shaolong shook hands with Prince Dan to seal their agreement and he left in search of Lu Gong, proceeding with the next step in his grand plan.

Ever since the return from his last mission, this is the first time he is approaching a task with such enthusiasm.

He finally know how deeply he loves Shan Rou.

The minute he sat down with Lu Gong in a private hall, Xiang Shaolong began in a deep voice, "I want to kill Tian Dan."

Lu Gong was shocked and checked, "What did you say?"

Today, this is the fifth time he is saying he wants to kill Tian Dan. First, he said it to Tian Dan, followed by Teng Yi, Lord Longyang, Prince Dan and finally to Lu Gong, the number one head of the Qin military.

To openly kill an earth-shaking figure like Tian Dan is setting a new precedence in history.

Full of confidence and persuasion, he explained, "This is the only way to prevent Lu Buwei from dominating Qin politics."

Lu Gong was puzzled, "What has this got to do with Tian Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong simply state, “The eastern states have recently attacked us but why is Qi not involved?”

Lu Gong’s expression became thoughtful and replied after a short while, “Is Shaolong referring to Tian Dan and Lu Buwei’s secret collaboration?”

Xiang Shaolong positively explained, “In the past, Lu Buwei did not have any military accomplishments. Now, he has conquered the three eastern provinces and solidified his position. When the combined armies taught him a serious lesson, he focused on his present status and put aside any plans to mount another eastern campaign. What he plans to do now is to increase his power in Qin and the Zhengguo canal is the first step in his grand plan.”

Lu Gong was agitated upon hearing this.

For the past two days, he himself has been complaining to Xu Xian, Wang Ling and other military leaders, cursing Lu Buwei for having an ulterior motive and wasting manpower and resources over the canal. This will weaken the country and interfere with plans to unite the world.

Xiang Shaolong is sure that he is disturbed and egged him further, “Therefore, Lu Buwei is now in league with Chu and Qi, isolating Yan and the allied states. This is to safeguard his external interests and focus on internal issues. He can then focus on building up his influence. If he is successful, our state of Qin will land in the hands of this outsider.”

His latest words have an even greater impact that the last sentence, stunning this strong advocate of Qin race

superiority. Lu Gong thought for a while and raised his head, his eyes shining with energy and stared straight at Xiang Shaolong, asking in a deep voice, "Before we continue further, I need you to clear something up. Why are you so certain that the Crown Prince is not Lu Buwei's illegitimate child?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad that Lu Gong is moved and therefore asked such a question. If he can assure him, the discussion can continue smoothly.

He sincerely looked back at him and revealed, "It is very simple. I have my own suspicions as well and questioned Lu Buwei's confidante Xiao Yuetan about this. He swore that Crown Prince is indeed the late king's flesh and blood because when Zhu Ji became pregnant, the only man she is sleeping with is King Zhuangxiang."

Lu Gong frowned, "I know this man Xiao Yuetan and he is someone who should know the truth. But since he is Lu Buwei's trusted subordinate, he may continue to conceal this secret for Lu Buwei despite his own death."

Xiang Shaolong's eyes reddened and intimately disclosed, "When Xiao Yuetan died, not only does he declare himself free from Lu Buwei's control; he even hated Lu Buwei to the core. It is all because the man who killed him is Lu Buwei."

Lu Gong was not horrific at this news. Stretching out his hand, he grabbed Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and nervously asked, "Do you have any proof of this?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head in grief.



Lu Gong released him and remarked, "We have investigated this matter on our side but those who came back alive did not know what happened. Qu Douqi and the others have disappeared so there are many suspicious points but there is nothing we can do to Lu Buwei. When you came back and hurriedly retreated to the farms, we know that something is amiss."

Sighing, he added, "I believe Shaolong is telling the truth. I guess we need not carry on with the blood test."

Determined, Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "No! The blood test must still be conducted. Only this way can we fully verify that the Crown Prince is the late king's flesh and blood."

Lu Gong stared at him solemnly and inquired, "I like the way you handled things. Yesterday, Du Bi came looking for me and told me you said something to the late king on his deathbed. The late king then passed away peacefully. What did Shaolong say to him?"

Xiang Shaolong is certain that Du Bi learnt about this from Lady Xiuli. Without hesitation, he divulged, "I told the late king that if he is murdered by someone, I will do whatever I can to avenge him."

Of course he made some changes to the words and purposely left Lu Buwei's name out.

Lu Gong stood up and his eyes shone with determination. Looking up to the sky with agony, he took some time to recompose himself. Finally, he barked, "Fine! Shaolong, what can I do to help you?"

Xiang Shaolong quickly stood up to match him and respectfully state, "Lu Buwei's influence is growing day by day. To stop him, we must first destroy his alliance with the outsiders. If we can kill Tian Dan, it will not only help in uniting the world, it will also force Lu Buwei to spend some effort against foreign attacks and protect the three eastern provinces. We can then slowly erode his power within Qin."

Lu Gong shows signs of anger and grabbed Xiang Shaolong's arm, leading him to the rear garden. His face tight with emotion, he gritted his teeth, "Why don't we command our army and attack his residence, annihilating every single person related to him? As long as the Crown Prince nods his head, I can accomplish this easily."

Xiang Shaolong lowered his voice, saying, "You must not do this. Lu Buwei has gained the loyalty of many officials. If this matter is leaked out and he strikes first, it will be disastrous and may even cause the death of Crown Prince and Empress. Even if we succeeded, Cheng Chongqiao and Lord Gaoling will immediately vie for the throne. If Qin deteriorates to such a condition and the six states adding fuel to fire, our country may be split into three factions just like in the past."

Lu Gong's face changed colour and he softly held Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and asked in a low voice, "Tell me how I can help you?"

Xiang Shaolong is mad with joy. With Lu Gong's consent, Tian Dan is almost as good as dead.

## CHAPTER 2

## The Stubborn Qin Lady

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

LEAVING the Lieutenant General's residence, Xiang Shaolong galloped non-stop. Fortunately for him, Qin Qing's residence is along the same street leading to the palace. It is separated from the palace by twenty over residences belonging to other Marquises and Generals.

He wanted to keep a low profile and rode alone on an ordinary horse. Jifeng and the Guardians have all been sent back to the Cavalry Command Centre.

To make it easier to walk, he has removed his heavy armour and is dressed in a warrior suit. However, his imposing stature is hard to remain unnoticed but at least it makes him feel more at ease.

The sun is gradually setting in the west and there are hardly any passersby on roads. Xiang Shaolong was reminded about Shan Rou and could not help but feel dejected.

He can only lessen his pain by working hard to avenge her!

A group of loud galloping sounds can be heard. A group of ten odd riders rode towards him.

Xiang Shaolong has a high sense of awareness and scanned them carefully. He was shocked at what he saw.

Unbelievably, it is a cohort of female riders. Dressed in different colours of warrior suits, they resembled a colourful rainbow flowing down the long street.

They seemed to be competing among themselves on their horse speed and horsemanship. They speedily overtook every chariot and horse in front of them. In the blink of an eye, they are almost upon him.

Xiang Shaolong recollected Lord Changping's sister Ying Ying and her female army. Curious, he looked closer at them.

The leading rider is a young lady in a yellow and white warrior suit. As beautiful as an angel, she is even prettier than Lu Niangrong. Riding her horse with gusto, she looks even more young and lively.

She has long legs like Zhao Zhi and is as charming as Wu Tingfang. Her snowy skin is comparable to Ji Yanran's. Adding that to her slender waist and full chest, it was a mesmerizing sight. It is a body to die for.

Xiang Shaolong could not help but praise her figure secretly.

The other riders paled in comparison.

The most unique thing is that she carries a proud and satisfied smile on her face, as if all the men in the world are only good enough to be trodden by her horse. Interestingly, every man who saw her lowered their gaze and dare not look straight at her.

Xiang Shaolong is almost sure that this beauty is Ying Ying herself. When she saw him, her pretty eyes lit up like the stars at night.

Xiang Shaolong was terrified and lowered his head, avoiding her gaze.

Ying Yong whistled once and the entire fleet of fifteen female riders stopped their horses and arranged themselves in a neat formation. They are as disciplined as the Qin army, if not better.

Xiang Shaolong can see trouble coming. Lowering his head, he tried to slip away and his mind is full of panic.

Are these female warriors so aggressive that they pick up fights with passerby on the streets?

With this thought running through his head, he heard swishing sounds. Ying Ying is apparently swinging her horsewhip over her head. Once she has gained enough momentum, she lashed out towards his back.

Xiang Shaolong was infuriated.

This stubborn girl is truly overbearing. He did not know her nor have any enmity but yet she attacked him.

He listened intently for the whip striking down and stretched his hand, grabbing the whip.

If his opponent is a male, he would continue to pull strongly on the whip, causing the other party to fall down his horse and be embarrassed. But his opponent this time is a young maiden and he could not bear to embarrass her.

Ying Ying let out a cry and pulled strongly at the whip.

Xiang Shaolong turned around and pulled the whip strongly too. The beauty is strong as well and the whip is straightened by both their pulling. Both of them exchanged a fierce look. There is a six feet distance between them which is the length of the whip in addition to the length of their arms.

Everyone else on the street disappeared to avoid getting into trouble.

The female warriors spread out like a fan and cornered Xiang Shaolong against the wall.

Ying Ying's mouth curled up in a satisfied smile and tugged her horse. The horse reacted to her tug and began to step back.

Xiang Shaolong praised her secretly and released the whip.  
Ka-Ching!

Every female warrior pulled out their swords and pointed them at Xiang Shaolong and scolded him with vulgar words like 'basterd' and 'damn your mother.' These vulgarities are only heard among the scoundrels of Xianyang City.

Xiang Shaolong can feel a headache coming, knowing that he has run into 'female hell riders.'

Ying Ying retrieved her horse whip and was feeling very proud. She rode forwardly slightly and barked to her warriors, "Are you trying to kill someone? Sheathe your swords!"

Xiang Shaolong and the ladies are all confused. The ladies were puzzled and sheathe their swords.

Ying Ying's laughter rang out like a bell, "You are good! Such a fine fellow! Come with me and let me try out your sword skills."

Xiang Shaolong was astonished, "Does Mistress know what I am?"

Ying Ying impatiently retorted, "You did not even tell me, how am I suppose to know which presumptuous fool you are?"

The female warriors looked at him closely and saw that he is silly looking besides his heroic air. Their hostility reducing greatly, they start to criticise his appearance.

From her tone, it seems like there is some rift between them. However, he cannot recall any such incident after going through his memory and apologised, "My apologies but I have an errand to run and cannot accompany you."

Ying Ying was displeased and curled up her proud and toned lips, laughing coldly, "You do not know what is good for you. Girls! Get him!"

Xiang Shaolong did not know whether to laugh or cry. The female warriors have reacted to her command with two of them producing a huge net normally used to catch animals. The other warriors re-drew their swords and approached him.

There are some onlookers a distance away. They may have been bullied by them before and is unclear of Xiang Shaolong's status and dared not intervene.

Xiang Shaolong laughed loudly and rolled on the floor right under the nets, and was in front of Ying Ying's warhorse in a flash.

The warhorse was startled and raised its front hoofs and was about to step on Xiang Shaolong. Xiang Shaolong somersaulted and was beside the horse in a split second.

Ying Ying reacted quickly and her whip is swishing through the air towards Xiang Shaolong.



Xiang Shaolong roared loudly and leapt up, landing behind the horse and avoiding the whip.

Unexpectedly, Ying Ying's long boots kicked to the back towards Xiang Shaolong's chest.

Xiang Shaolong could not imagine her fighting prowess has reached such a level and had underestimated her. He was forced to retreat a few steps but his left shoulder has been grazed by her boot, leaving a small mark.

The other warriors cried out in joy and chased after him.

Xiang Shaolong could see that the situation is becoming disadvantageous. He sped along the chariot lane and squeezed into the crowd of onlookers. The situation became chaotic and he slipped away in the confusion.

Arriving at Qin Qing's residence, Xiang Shaolong was greatly amused and began to understand the suffering of the two Changping brothers.

Housekeeper Uncle Fang received him in the main hall and brought him into the inner hall.

Qin Qing and Ji Yanran were happily playing a tune on their musical instruments.

Wu Tingfang, Zhao Zhi, Tian Zhen, Tian Feng and the maids of Qin Qing are gathered at a large garden outside the building. Under the evening sunshine, they take turns playing with Xiang Bao'er who has learnt how to walk a few steps. The air is filled with their cheerful laughter.

Unfortunately, all Xiang Shaolong could think of is Shan Rou. The sight before him only adds to his pain.

He went to the garden and greeted Wu Tingfang and Zhao Zhi, taking time to cuddle his son Xiang Bao'er. He then returned back to the inner hall and joined them at their table, ignoring all the usual boundaries between him and Qin Qing.

Qin Qing was delighted, "Bao'er has been playing the entire day but did not take his afternoon nap. I am amazed at his stamina."

Xiang Shaolong stared at the window and can still hear the ladies playing with Bao'er. Feeling emotional, he vented, "A child's imagination is the richest. Everything that they see will be exciting, enriching and extraordinary. In the ordinary stuff that we see as adults, it is endless fun for them. Regrettably, when they grow up in the future, everything will be replaced by cold and harsh reality. This is the price to pay for growing up."

Both ladies exchanged a look and were deeply moved by his enlightening words. For a while, they were speechless. Xiang Shaolong turned his face and looked at them and was swept off his feet.

They resembled two blossoming flowers but did not suppress each other's beauty.

Ji Yanran is charming and glamorous while Qin Qing is elegant and classy. They are the best there is.

Qin Qing's delicate face turned slightly red and lowered her gaze, gently mentioning, "Mister Xiang is finally able to come and visit your wives and kid."

Finishing, she realised that she had a slip of the tongue and her jade face became even redder.

Ji Yanran gazed lovingly at Xiang Shaolong and whispered, "Why does hubby seem to be troubled about something?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed but did not reply her.

Qin Qing took the initiative and excused her and joined them at the garden, allowing them to speak in privacy.

Xiang Shaolong inquired in a deep voice, "Do you recall the letter Lord Chunshen wrote to Zhao Mu? Can your family warriors duplicate a copy?"

Ji Yanran answered, "No problem. They are skilled in forgery. What shall be the content?"

Xiang Shaolong detailed, "It will be a secret letter from Lord Chunshen to Li Yuan, informing him that the King of Chu is gravely ill and commanding him to return to Chu immediately. At the same time, instructing him to keep this a secret from Qin or Qin may take advantage of Chu's political instability. You can add whatever else you think is appropriate."

Ji Yanran was astounded, "What is going on?"

Hot tears begin to leave Xiang Shaolong's eyes. In a grieved voice, he revealed, "Shan Rou is dead!"

Xiao Pan received him in his bedroom and dismissed the palace maids. "What has happened?" he questioned in surprise.

Xiang Shaolong repeated what he told Lu Gong and emphasized on Lu Buwei conspiracy with Qi and Chu.

Xiao Pan thought for a while and frowned, "But this policy of allying with the far countries and attacking the neighbouring countries has always been our strategy. Lu Buwei is only proceeding according to this direction and I don't see what is wrong."

Xiang Shaolong could tell that Xiao Pan is no longer a kid who can be easily manipulated. He nodded, "Crown Prince is right. But Lu Buwei is a man with ulterior motives. If he has his external affairs settled, he can focus on politics and eliminate all his opponents. If one day, Lu Gong, Xu Xian and the other generals have been killed by him, we will not be able to overcome him in the future."

Xiao Pan was shaken, "I am most afraid of him killing Master."

Xiang Shaolong had not thought about himself.

Although his intention to kill Tian Dan is because of Shan Rou, his suspicions of Lu Buwei are not without reason.

After being defeated by the combined armies, Lu Buwei has overhauled his strategy and focused on building up his political might.

King Zhuangxiang has lost his usefulness and became an obstacle. This heartless man used poison to remove him and paved way for his own son Xiao Pan.

He needs to take a little break now.

If he still wants to engage the six states in war, he will not dare to make changes in the Qin military, such as replacing a huge number of military leaders with his own men who are far less capable and experienced.

If he can hold the six states at bay and use a few years, he can cultivate a new generation of capable men who can help him control Qin. By then, even if he turns Qin into his own playground, no one can oppose him.

Against the six states, the allied states are as close as family. Regardless of Lu Buwei's scheming, it will not work against them. So he ignored them totally and conspired with Qi and Chu. In the future, Yan will belong to Qi, Wei will belong to Chu, Zhao and Han will belong to Qin. With this agreement, he can focus his energies on Qin politics.

After his lengthy explanation, Xiao Pan was enlightened.

From this, Xiang Shaolong can see the difference in Xiao Pan.

In the past, Xiao Pan will listen to his words without question. Now, he is beginning to take ownership of his own decisions, thinking and position.

He is becoming more and more like Qin Shihuang.

By the time Xiang Shaolong arrived at the Lord Changping's residence, he is already an hour late. This is unavoidable. Given his present circumstances, the fact that he even showed up is already giving plenty of respect to the two lords.

Feeling like an ugly daughter-in-law going to see her father-in-law, he went in with the hideous mark on his shoulder left by Ying Ying's boot. Led by a servant into the main hall, he had a big fright.

It is not a question about the number of guests but who they are. Seated on two rows of ten seats, only Lord Changping, Lord Changwen and An Gu are male. The rest are all female warriors.

When the attendant announced, "Imperial Cavalry Commander Xiang Shaolong," the noisy hall became as quiet as a grave in an instant.

Lord Changping jumped up and welcomed him at the door. Holding him, he frowned, "I did not anticipate my sister to bring her female warriors and scared all the guests away. Only An Gu is a true friend. Ai! But if he wasn't the special guest tonight, he may have slipped off too. Luckily you came to join us, otherwise, Ai! Come! Let's talk more when we settled down."

It is now Xiang Shaolong's turn to hold him and questioned, "Why are they here?"

Lord Changping replied, "To see the famous Xiang Shaolong."

Xiang Shaolong whispered, "Who are they?"

Lord Changping whispered back, "They are all unmarried virgins and are all younger than eighteen years old. The best fighters are Sister Ying Ying and Lu Gong's granddaughter Lu Dan'er. If you cannot please them, you wouldn't be able to leave tonight."

Xiang Shaolong was about to ask how he can please them when Ying Ying's shrill voice rang out behind Lord Changping, "Big Brother! Are you trying to help Xiang Shaolong escape?"

Her view has been blocked by Lord Changping and did not see Xiang Shaolong. After she finished speaking, she saw him and her eyes lit up, calling, "So it is you!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "That's right."

Lord Changping is astonished, "Have you two met before?"

Ying Ying stomped her feet, "He is the asshole who saved the young man at the market and left without saying his name."

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization.

The family warrior who invited him the other day is her family warrior. Fortunately, she did not see himself with Tu Xian or it will be catastrophic. No wonder she attacked him today.

Lord Changping did not suspect her story and smiled, "That's great. Ever since she came back, she has been thinking about you, but..."

Ying Ying stood up with her arms akimbo and challenged, “I dare you to continue!”

Lord Changping was terrified and smiled weakly, “Fine. I will stop. Come! Let’s have a drink. Everything in the past is a misunderstanding.”

Ying Ying cooed, “Come!” and happily led the way in front.

Glancing at her beautiful back and her rare long legs, he was slightly intoxicated.

All of a sudden, he felt that these female warriors are not as scary as they look.

To a certain extent, he was afraid to go home and see people or things that remind him of Shan Rou.

After he learnt of Shan Rou’s demise, he has been keeping himself busy to numb his pain, using the most exciting experiences to erode his grief.

Until Shan Rou’s death did he realised how much he treasured her in his heart.

This is his next greatest blow after Zhao Qian’s death!



## CHAPTER 3

### The Female Warriors

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

UNDER the gaze of nearly a hundred female warriors, Xiang Shaolong and Lord Changping entered the main hall led by Ying Ying.

Xiang Shaolong has the perfect body tightly dressed in a simple warrior suit. Except for the dirty mark on his shoulder, he strolls in gracefully with his right hand on his sword hilt and his left arm swinging by his side, almost like a modern male model striding down the cat walk. Everyone in hall could not help but be mesmerized by him.

The women warriors who attacked him earlier realised that it was Xiang Shaolong who is the dream man of many Xianyang ladies. They were especially taken aback.

Ying Ying went back to her seat. Before she could sit down, another beauty next to her jumped up and whispered into her ears before resuming their seats together.

Xiang Shaolong, Lord Changping, Lord Changwen and An Gu were seated at a table full of dishes and wine. Lord Changping sighed, "Thanks to Shaolong's presence, we brothers have finally fulfilled our sister's demand."

Lord Changwen was disappointed, "Why didn't Shaolong bring Talented Lady Ji and let us have a look at her? Big Brother said he reminded you."

An Gu smiled, "Shaolong! Now you finally got a taste of how irritating they are. Luckily, I have to leave the city for my duties. I shall pass on this burden to you. Good luck!"

Xiang Shaolong is already burdened with countless worries and sadness. Now, as he is facing these three friendly and sincere men in a place filled with young, passionate girls, his accumulated stress begin to go away. Finally relaxing, he grabbed his wine cup and was about to drink when Ying Ying's voice rang out behind him, "Don't drink wine! Otherwise when you lose, you will say that we are being unfair to you."

Xiang Shaolong was surprised and suspicious. Holding back his wine cup, he turned around and questioned, "What does drinking wine have to do with winning and losing?"

The whole hall quietened down.

Ying Ying and the pretty girl seated with her came in front of him, both putting on the airs of a spoilt and stubborn character.

Behind him, An Gu sighed, "Shaolong should know their prowess by now. If they attacked openly with a fair fight, I will lose without a single complaint. Somehow, they have so many tricks up their sleeves and I was taken by surprise every single time."

The beautiful girl stared at him and giggled sweetly. Her mouth curled up with a proud look, she plainly state, "Dear General An, I had regarded you as someone important in Xianyang City! Hng! Since young, you have always been repudiating. Commander Xiang is not like you and will face our challenges bravely."

Xiang Shaolong looked back and exchanged a helpless grin with An Gu. Lord Changping came to his ear and whispered, "They called themselves the Royal Reviewer. Hei! They joked that Generals promoted by the Qin court has to undergo a second review with them to prove their worthiness."

Ying Ying impatiently cut in, "Cut the crap. Shaolong will now compete with Dan'er in wine drinking."

When she mentioned Dan'er, she arrogantly pointed to the pretty girl beside her with her thumb.

Xiang Shaolong eyes landed on Lu Dan'er petite face and begin to scrutinize Lu Gong's stubborn granddaughter.

Lu Dan'er's eyes matched his gaze. She has a nice smile and her eyes are glowing with happiness, mischief and arrogance.

But she is indeed pretty and does not look a day over sixteen. In these ancient times, it is a marriageable age. But just looking at her wild and formidable aura, a weak husband will be unable to control her.

Compared to Ying Ying, she is shorter by half a head. She has a well-proportioned body and did not have any excess fats due to constant exercise. Any normal man who saw her will be aroused.

Like Ying Ying, they are energetic, lively and full of enthusiasm. With healthy complexions and white glowing skin, they are truly alluring.

However, Ying Ying is slightly more appealing than her.

Scanning her body next, Xiang Shaolong lowered his gaze and caught sight of her full and perky chest.

While he was secretly praising the full bosoms of Qin ladies, Lu Dan'er's face reddened and she looked down.

An Gu and the Lords laughingly retaliated, "Ha! Dan'er's face is red with embarrassment. What a rare sight!"

Ying Ying was astounded and glanced at her partner. Stomping her feet, she called, "Dan'er!"

Lu Dan'er shot a vicious look at Xiang Shaolong who has embarrassed her and denied, "Who is embarrassed? It is because the weather is too hot! Bring the wine!"

At last, Xiang Shaolong is fully familiar about these female warriors. They are just troublemakers in Xianyang City. As most of them are related to high-ranking officials and are spoilt by nature, they are able to terrorise the commoners without much repercussions.

Several giggling young ladies came in carrying a few jugs of wine. The battle is about to begin.

An Gu came to Xiang Shaolong's side and smiled, "How is your alcohol tolerance? This lady's liqueur capacity is not something to laugh about."

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "Why do we have to hold a drinking contest?"

Ying Ying stepped forward and proclaimed, "Wine drinking is a man's forte. We want to challenge you men in your best forte. Understand?"

An Gu produced a spitting sound and barked, "What are you so proud about? You wanted to get Commander Xiang drunk and then compete with him in martial arts. When you have won, you will brag about it. I know all your dirty tricks!"

Lu Dan'er is bitter about An Gu embarrassing her earlier and arrogantly retorted, "You are our defeated opponent and how dare you speak like that? You lost in the last archery

contest and blamed us instead of your own incompetency. What a loser.”

Au Gu faced Xiang Shaolong with an agonized smile, “Now you should know what I mean.”

Xiang Shaolong could only smile weakly in return.

The imposing Ying Ying commanded, “Except for the contestants, everyone else return to your seats.”

She led her warriors back to their seats, leading by example

Lord Changping whispered before he left, “Good luck!” and returned to his seat with Lord Changwen and An Gu.

Slightly fearful of Xiang Shaolong, Lu Dan’er sat down and raised the wine jug in front, commenting, “Let’s drink up our share of wine and compete our archery skills in the rear garden. Quick! Why are you hesitating like a woman!”

The female warriors burst out in laughter and made all sorts of jeering noises.

Xiang Shaolong felt his own tummy and realised that he had not eaten a single meal today. It is a taboo to drink wine on an empty stomach and he is bound to lose. He hardened his resolve and shot back, “Such an impatient little doll. You have already lost to me in terms of patience.”

He purposely looked at her chest again and walked towards Ying Ying. Sitting down opposite her, his stomach began to rumble.

Ying Ying raised her eyebrows and implored, "Since when did you last eat something?"

Everyone in the hall laughed loudly.

Xiang Shaolong could not be bothered with her and started eating. At the same time, he was puzzled. An Gu is a great drinker and how could he lose to a young girl.

Suddenly, he was inspired and thought about the bar girls in the 21st century. Their drinks are always diluted to earn more money and also to prevent them from getting drunk.

Remembering this, he turned back and returned to the 'battleground.' Sitting down across her, he conveniently placed his wine in front of her and pointed to the jug she is hugging. He demanded, "I will drink your wine and you will drink mine!"

The entire hall quietened down.

Lu Dan'er was flustered and shrilled, "The wine is the same. You drink your own wine!"

An Gu laughed loudly and jumped up, exclaiming, "I see! I see! No wonder I lost the last time!"

Lu Dan'er is so furious her face became red again. She shot an angry look at Xiang Shaolong before giggling out loudly. She put down her wine jug and slipped back to her seat.

An Gu and the two Lords cheered loudly and received the victorious Xiang Shaolong back to his seat. Xiang Shaolong has never seen them so excited before.

All the girls are laughing so hard they can barely sit straight. None of them felt guilty about their trick being exposed.

Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er had a quick discussion and came up to their table. Ying Ying declared, "So it is considered a draw!"

Lord Changwen is confused, "Shaolong has obviously won. How come it is a draw?"

Displeased, Ying Ying retorted, "Second Brother has eyes that cannot see. The mark on Commander Xiang's shoulder is left by my boot. Isn't this a draw? To determine the winner, we must have another round of competition."

An Gu was curious, "What happened?"

Ying Ying stubbornly interrupted, "Don't deny it if you are a man. Come! We shall compete on strength."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback, "Compete on strength!"

Ying Ying charmingly smiled, "Of course we must compete in everything. I dare you to say 'women are weaklings' in the future."

Finishing, they returned to their table.

Lord Changping advised Xiang Shaolong, "Do not underestimate her. This woman possesses brute strength. Not many people in Xianyang City can win her."

Xiang Shaolong noticed a huge woman coming out from the crowd and a girl bringing out a long rope and another girl



drawing boundaries on the floor. It looks like a game of tug of war.

Xiang Shaolong was baffled. Women are limited by nature to be weaker than men. Even if they have a large body, they can defeat common men but not martial arts practitioners like Lord Changping. He unconsciously looked down to her feet and saw some sort of talcum powder scattered on the floor. He guessed it is another trick and suggested to the huge lady, "To prevent cheating, I suggest we take off our shoes before we compete!"

The ladies became silent and there is a strange expression on their faces.

As if this is the first time she saw him, Ying Ying stared blankly at Xiang Shaolong for a short while. Stomping her feet, she hissed, "Exposed by you again. Why can't you give us a break?"

Even her two brothers are stunned by her stubborn behaviour.

Before she finished speaking, the ladies were laughing uncontrollably and the atmosphere is very cheerful.

Amused, Xiang Shaolong went back to his seat. The three men are laughing so hard that their stomachs hurt.

An Gu held his breath and barely spoke out, "What an exciting night! All my frustrations have been vented out."

Lu Dan'er yelled, "Stop laughing!"

Everyone stifled their laughter.

Lord Changping challenged, "What other tricks do you have?"

Xiang Shaolong understood that these females are just troublemakers who use tricks to ridicule men. They do not have any ill intentions and there is no real damage done. Thus, the people of Xianyang tolerated their antics.

Lu Dan'er proclaimed, "We have competed on tricks and Xiang Shaolong has won. Now, we will compete on real abilities."

An Gu snorted, "What is there to compete? Can you defeat Wang Jian? Shaolong fought Wang Jian and it was a draw. You better save your breath. Come! Dan'er! Sing me a song and let's see how much you have improved."

Lu Dan'er made a face at him. Displeased, she remarked, "Previously, we are testing if Commander Xiang is an idiot like you. Now we are playing for real."

An Gu was speechless.

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "We can compete in anything but I must choose the topic. Otherwise, forget it."

Lu Dan'er invited, "Let's hear it!"

Ying Ying dared not underestimate Xiang Shaolong anymore and kept tugging Lu Dan'er's sleeve.

Lu Dan'er softly assured, "We need not fear him!"

It is now the three men's turn to laugh and jeer, making the situation extremely lively.

Xiang Shaolong raised his wine jug and drank two large mouthfuls.

The scorching wine entered his throat and he was reminded of Shan Rou. Grieved, he sighed loudly.

Lord Changwen leaned over and whispered into his ear, "Is something troubling Shaolong?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and summoned his courage. Facing Lu Dan'er he began, "First, you can send anyone you want to accept my challenge. This person will represent your group. If she loses, then your group has lost. In the future, you must not harass me with other competitions."

The ladies gathered together and discussed in secret. They dared not let down their guard against him anymore.

To the three men, he commented, "Shoot the horse to capture the man, catch the bandit king and the bandits will succumb. Watch and see!"

An Gu praised, "Shaolong is so capable and vented the frustration for all the bullied men of Xianyang City."

The ladies have concluded and Ying Ying stood up. Puffing her chest, she declared, "If we're fighting, I will be your opponent. But you can only hit my sword and my body. If you happened to injure me, you will not be able to compensate."

Xiang Shaolong is already aware of their unfair and stubborn ways to achieve victory. Expectedly, he exclaimed, "You will be fighting me? That's wonderful! Let's have a wrestling match!"

Every girl started to protest.

Ying Ying is so angry her face turned red and furiously state, "You are so demanding."

The three men clapped loudly and cheered in approval.

An Gu seems to have plenty of 'deep grievances'. He chortled, "After the wrestling, Sister Ying has to leave the female army and marry into the Xiang family as Shaolong has touched every part of your body. If he does not marry you, then it will really be hard for him to compensate you."

Xiang Shaolong began to recognize how open the people of Qin are when talking about such matters and was slightly regretful. If he made Ying Ying fall in love with himself, he will have plenty of headaches in the future.

On the other hand, he felt very excited and it was like he is flirting with girls back in the 21st century.

Lu Dan'er 'righteously' spoke, "If this is the battlefield, weapons will be used to fight for survival. This is just a banquet friendly match. Must we watch them wrestle like that? Obviously not!"

The girls begin to protest to help Ying Ying and they are noisier than the marketplace. For a while, it was chaos.

Xiang Shaolong let out a long laugh and gathered everyone's attention. He solemnly mentioned, "When fighting a battle, every method has to be used. When you want to capture an enemy, you may have to use some tricks. Are you going to tell the enemy that no wrestling is allowed during the fight?"

Everyone was humoured and broke out into laughter, forgetting their differences. Infuriated, Lu Dan'er stomped her feet and screamed, stopping the laughter. However, some girls continued to chuckle in the background.

Xiang Shaolong kept forcing his way, "Bring me a mat. You girls mentioned that whatever men can do, you can do better. Stop your whining and stop embarrassing yourself."

Ying Ying held back her own laughter. Shooting him a dirty look, she swore, "You are good, but this is not over yet. We will temporary retreat and show you the might of our Qin Female Army at a later date. Dismiss!"

The four men stared in amazement as all the girls left the hall simultaneously. They did not look angry but were still giggling, showing that they have a good impression of Xiang Shaolong.

The four men were elated and drank to their heart's content.

It was four am when they reluctantly concluded the banquet.

Xiang Shaolong left with An Gu. As they travelled down the street, Xiang Shaolong recomposed himself and officially asked, "There is something I need to bother Brother An!"

Riding beside him on this quiet street at night, An Gu smiled, "I get along with Shaolong very well. Just call me Gu. Tell me about it. As long as it is within my abilities, I will do my best."

Xiang Shaolong noticed their escorts are not too far away from them. He lowered his voice, "I want Gu to help me seal the border leading to Chu and arrest every messenger from Qi."

An Gu was slightly shaken, "You wants to attack Tian Dan?"

From his quick thinking and intellect, Xiang Shaolong is certain that An Gu did not take any shortcuts to earn his former rank as the Head of the Palace Guards.

Xiang Shaolong continued in a low voice, "That's right. The real person I am attacking is Lu Buwei. The Crown Prince and Lu Gong knew about this too but this is a huge secret. Brother An may verify with them on this."

An Gu assured, "Why bother? Will Shaolong want to harm me? Leave this to me."

After a short contemplation, he offered, "I have a plan that can cause the two armies of Qi and Chu waiting at the border to retreat by more than ten miles. I wonder if it would help."

Xiang Shaolong was mystified, "How can Gu accomplish this?"

An Gu confidently revealed, "The Qin and Chu border is an uninhabited, mountainous area. No one knows where the border line is. We assumed the river from Sanchuan is the dividing line. We can pretend to clash with their armies and I will meet the generals from Qi and Chu for a truce. To show goodwill, everyone has to retreat by ten miles. This way, when Tian Dan leaves our border, he must still travel some distance before he meets with his own army. Even if the Qi army receives word and presses near to our border, we can use the excuse that they have crossed the border so we have to chase them away. This will make it easy for Shaolong to execute your plan. Hei! Qin is afraid of no one!"

Xiang Shaolong was over the moon. Finalising the details with him, they went on their own ways.

On the way home, Xiang Shaolong once again experienced the uncertain feeling of whether this is a dream or reality.

He was once a homeless scavenger and now he is the top favourite subordinate of Qin Shihuang. Moreover, he is battling the powerful Left Premier Lu Buwei and even planning to kill the legendary Tian Dan. What a feeling!

Like an invisible hand, fate is guiding him flawlessly to create history based on the history he learned.

But history did not mention anything about a man named Xiang Shaolong. Why? What is his ending? He could not help but feel muddle-headed.

## CHAPTER 4

## Feelings

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BACK at the Wu residence, Teng Yi is still awake and is drinking alone in the dark.

Xiang Shaolong is sure that he is agonizing over Shan Rou's death and sat beside him without saying a single word.

Teng Yi passed him some wine and disclosed, "Tian Dan went to find Lu Buwei after he met you and left after a long time. He must have been complaining to Lu Buwei about you. After that, he went to find Li Yuan. A single sentence from Third Brother has terrified him so much."



Xiang Shaolong swallowed a gulp of wine and his tears begin to fall uncontrollably from his face. In a deep voice, he commented, "This is better than I expect. To comfort him, Lu Buwei will swear to kill me during the hunting festival. They will allow Li Yuan to return to Chu first and leave Tian Dan behind. After all, he wanted to see me dead before he can return to Qi with peace of mind."

Smelling strongly of alcohol, Teng Yi remarked, "I did not think about that. It must be Rou'er assisting us from Heaven to take his miserable life."

Xiang Shaolong inquired, "Has Yanran started work on the fake letter?"

Teng Yi nodded, "Yes. I got a pigeon messenger to send it back to the farm immediately. According to Yanran, Uncle Qing and his men just need one night to forge a fake letter based on the letter from Lord Chunshen to Zhao Mu. It is guaranteed to be foolproof."

The pigeon messenger is a new secret weapon Xiang Shaolong introduced to the Wu Family Elite Warriors. This will speed up communication between the farms and Xianyang City and was implemented recently.

Xiang Shaolong silently drank another two cups of wine and wiped away his tears. "Have you told Jing Jun?" he asked in a deep voice.

Teng Yi sighed, "Tomorrow! He ought to know. He was overjoyed with his Yan beauty and let's give him another day of happiness!"

He asked, "Will Li Yuan really leave after receiving the letter?"

Xiang Shaolong coldly sniggered, "Similar to Lu Buwei using women to gain power, Li Yuan is using her pretty sister as a gift to the same effect. If he learns about Xiaolie's condition, he will not be bothered about Tian Dan. Lu Buwei will encourage him to return immediately and execute their plan. I expect that they will try to take Lord Chunshen's life. The Lord is so amusing and yet pitiful."

Teng Yi sighed, "Third Brother is becoming more and more formidable, covering every aspect of the plan flawlessly."

Xiang Shaolong icily laughed, "For Shan Rou and Second Brother, I will do whatever I can to kill Tian Dan. Killing Mo Ao is another crucial part of the plan. If this man continues to provide them with strategies, we may be killed by Tian Dan instead."

Teng Yi sighed, "This is my biggest worry too. If Lu Buwei sent his own warriors and escort Tian Dan all the way until he meets his own army, it will be impossible for us to act."

Xiang Shaolong confidently explained, "Remember the last time we spoke about Lord Gaoling conspiring with Zhao General Pang Nuan? If I am not mistaken, these two men will try to rebel during the hunting fair. Lu Buwei will be too busy dealing with them and will not have time for Tian Dan. As long as we misled Tian Dan that Xianyang City is an unsafe place, he will rush back to Qi via Chu as soon as possible, giving us the golden opportunity."

Speaking till here, the sky is gradually brightening up but neither man felt the least urge to sleep.

Xiang Shaolong stood up, "I don't know what but I am pining for Ji Yanran and the ladies. Since it is still early, I will visit them at Qin Residence. Second Brother should spend some time with Sister-in-law."

Teng Yi appreciated, "You go ahead! I still want to think about some things."

Qin Qing is pruning her plants in her garden and saw Xiang Shaolong coming to her place before the sky is fully bright. Stunned, she put aside her gardening tool carefully in an intricate bronze box and instructed her attendant to bring it into the house. She simply state, "They are still asleep. I heard that Commander Xiang has the habit of sleeping late and they have inherited your habit as well. Why don't we take a stroll?"

How can Xiang Shaolong reject her? He walked beside her and enjoyed her fabulous garden with many unique plants and the fragrances of flowers filled the air. They travelled down a zigzag path that snakes through carefully pruned trees and bushes.

Birds are chirping loudly, filling the garden with a sense of liveliness.

With a solemn expression, Qin Qing led him down the path. With a hint of blame in her tone, she asked, "Your hair is messy; your clothes are untidy and there is a dirty mark on your shoulder area. Both of your eyes are red and swollen

and you smell strongly of alcohol. You must have stayed up the whole of last night?"

Xiang Shaolong did not anticipate this and was astonished, "You only peeped once at me and you can deduce so many things?"

Qin Qing turned her head at shot him a look, scolding, "Your words are vulgar and rude. Who is peeping at you?"

Xiang Shaolong can sense the happiness in her scolding and knew that she is not really blaming him. He bitterly laughed, "I am not fully conscious yet. Ai! I really look disgraceful compared to Grand Tutor Qin. My smelly alcohol fumes has polluted your fragrant scent!"

Qin Qing abruptly stopped walking and turned around. Before she could say anything, an aimless Xiang Shaolong bumped right into her.

Both of them shrieked out in fright and backed off instantly.

Qin Qing's face is burning red and a flustered Xiang Shaolong apologised, "Ai! So sorry! I am so muddle-headed! Did I hurt you?"

As he is saying this, the feeling of Qin Qing's tender and bouncy breasts on his own chest has left an everlasting impression.

Qin Qing shot him a vicious look and resumed a blank face. She lightly mentioned, "We are both careless. Forget it! But I must still reprimand you. As a gentleman, how can you pass such a comment about a lady's natural scent?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "I am not a gentleman and am not interested to be one! Honestly, I am quite afraid to talk to you. I may offend you without even knowing it!"

Qin Qing's face darkened and coldly replied, "So you are afraid to see me and thus advised me to leave for Bashu so that I will not pose as a hindrance to you?"

Xiang Shaolong was dumbfounded at this baseless accusation. He surrendered, "I only mentioned it by mistake! Grand Tutor Qin is still grudging me for this sentence? Let me kneel and kowtow to you for my mistake."

Qin Qing was startled and stopped him, "A man must not kneel down easily! Hng! You are playing a fool."

Xiang Shaolong stretched out in a yawn and took a deep breath. He left the small path and cut through the flowers, arriving at a small stream near a bridge. He kneeled down and used his hand to scoop up the running water, happily washing his face.

Qin Qing came to his back and was frowning at his uncouth behaviour. At the same time, her eyes twinkled with interest.

Xiang Shaolong used more water to wet his hair and combed it with his fingers. Rejuvenated, he looked up at the blue sky and the white clouds. Raising his hands, he declared, "Today is the first day of the rest of my life. I will live my life to the fullest."

Qin Qing repeated his words twice before she grasped its meaning. She was slightly shaken and remarked, "No wonder Yanran often mentioned that you are a very intelligent person. Words casually sprouted by you have such deep meanings and philosophies."

Xiang Shaolong blinked hard and gazed back at her, laughing, "Unexpectedly, I managed to hold a nice conversation with Grand Tutor Qin. Unfortunately, I have some matters to attend to but I am very satisfied already."

Qin Qing revealed a sweet and intimate smile, gently correcting, "It is really my honour. Actually, there is something I wanted to discuss with Commander Xiang. Can you spare some additional time?"

Actually, Xiang Shaolong did not have anything urgent to attend to but he is afraid he may start flirting with her if he stayed any longer. Qin Qing's charm is nothing to joke about. Unsure of her feelings towards him, he was tempted and teased her, "So there is something important. I thought Grand Tutor Qin treats me like a special person."

Qin Qing's jade face begin to glow and her almond shaped eyes stared at him as she exclaimed, "Commander Xiang! How can you use these flowery language on me?"

A shy looking Qin Qing is even more enchanting.

Xiang Shaolong slightly regretted his action but was highly excited at the same time.

In the past, Qin Qing will walk off and ignore him forever upon hearing these words. Her cheerful reply reminded him about his uncertain feeling about all these being a dream or reality.

Luckily, he has some strand of sanity left in him and bitterly smiled, "Please do not be angry. I am not clear-minded and was just joking with you!"

Qin Qing calmed and softly commented, "Yesterday, Empress Ji spoke to me about matchmaking the Crown Prince and asked for my opinion."

Xiang Shaolong was immediately alerted and was slightly shocked. "What does the Empress think?" He asked.

Qin Qing stepped forward and came within an arm's length of Xiang Shaolong. Her eyes deep in thought, she divulged, "She told me Lu Buwei explained to her the benefits of Crown Prince marrying the Princess of Chu, saying that it will prevent the six states from working together against Qin. But she is hesitant due to the violent objections of Lu Gong, Xu Xian and the other high ranking officials."

Unconsciously, Xiang Shaolong inched towards her and observed her unparalleled beauty. He then asked in a deep voice, "What advice did Grand Tutor Qin give her?"

Qin Qing apparently cannot tolerate the proximity between them and retreated half a step. She lowered her head and softly replied, "I told her that the Crown Prince may be young but has his own mindset and thinking. She should ask him directly."

Xiang Shaolong's nose is filled with her nice fragrance and was intoxicated. He took another small step towards her and lightly guessed, "She would reject your suggestion."

Qin Qing retreated again and was surprised, "How did you guess correctly?"

Xiang Shaolong wanted to see her reaction when she is distressed and stepped forward again. Now, they can almost smell each other breaths. He is almost invading her personal space and nearly touching her fast-heaving chest. He stared at her lowered head and whispered, "This is called having a guilty conscience. For the past few days, she has been trying her best to avoid him."

Qin Qing ran out of space to retreat and her ears are burning red. She complained in a low voice, "I am most fearful of the smell of alcohol!"

Xiang Shaolong was jolted awake and recognized that he had nearly molested her. He took two steps back apologetically and stammered, "I better take my leave."

Qin Qing's cheeks are red hot and her eyes are flashing with excitement. She glanced at him in silence.

Xiang Shaolong began to panic and uttered, "Hey! Why are you looking at me like this?"

Qin Qing broke into a smile, "I wanted to see if you will leave without finishing your words like what you did in the past, showing that you have a guilty conscience too!"

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed, Damn it!



The lady whose beauty equalled Ji Yanran is someone unique, elegant and classy. Her most attractive part is her wisdom. Every time he met her; he could not help but be attracted by her.

He came here early in the morning to lessen his pain by indulging himself with Ji Yanran and the girls. He secretly hoped to see Qin Qing as well. This is a very complicated and ironic thinking.

As Ji Yanran has mentioned, Qin Qing is the model lady who is widely respected and regarded by the people of Qin. Pure and chaste, she is a top beauty who cannot be violated.

But it is due to her special position and status that his desire to eat this forbidden fruit is even more challenging and exciting.

To a modern man from the 21st century, this is not a question of morals.

Qin Qing does not belong to the people of Qin. She belongs to herself.

Xiang Shaolong suppressed his temptation but could not resist rebutting her. He shrugged his shoulders and opened up his palms, "I have never stolen anything in my life so why should I feel guilty?"

Qin Qing is a master at handling her emotions. Resuming her icy blank expression, she casually reminded, "That's great! How? You have not told me your views about the marriage!"

Xiang Shaolong was agonized and implored, "This is not my forte. Will Grand Tutor Qin please enlighten me on the crucial aspects of the marriage?"

Qin Qing is annoyed, "Sometimes, you are incredibly clever like you can predict the future. Sometimes, you are as dumb as a bell. The marriage itself is crucial. Xu Xian and Wang Ling wanted Crown Prince to marry Lu Gong's granddaughter Lu Dan'er so as to preserve the purity of Qin's blood in the royal family. Lu Buwei wanted to spoil their plan as he is not a Qin native himself. Does Commander Xiang understand now?"

Xiang Shaolong was blown away by this insight.

At the end of the day, it is Qin's racist mindset. To an outsider like him, it doesn't mean anything but to the Qin, it represents their determination against Lu Buwei. If this matter is not handled well, it will put Xiao Pan in an unfavourable situation.

Qin Qing sighed, "I advised Empress to reconsider her thinking and wait for some time. She should decide only when she has a clearer understanding of the full picture."

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "That's the best plan for now. Lu Dan'er is really pretty but is actually a formidable tigress."

Qin Qing laughed, "You finally met the female army!"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "That was what happened last night."

Astounded, Qin Qing glanced at him, "You accompanied them throughout the night?"

Xiang Shaolong simply replied, "I am not so free."

Qin Qing questioned in a low voice, "What has happened? Last night, Yanran was playing the qin alone in the garden and her music is full of sadness, making everyone feel like crying. Are you treating me like an outsider? Why don't you share with me your sorrow?"

Xiang Shaolong intimately revealed, "We received news about the death of someone close to us. But only Yanran knows this. Grand Tutor Qing..."

Qin Qing nodded, "I understand. Does Commander Xiang want to take a look at Yanran and the rest? They should be up by now!"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "I will make a quick trip to the Command Centre. If I have time, I will visit them later!"

Qin Qing advised, "Commander Xiang should speak to Crown Prince about the marriage. I am sure he has the ability to make a good decision."

Xiang Shaolong nodded in agreement and left.

A sense of longing is growing within his heart. The longing is intertwined with complicated excitement and thrill.

Both Qin Qing and Xiang Shaolong know that they are travelling along a 'very dangerous' path. Sooner or later, they will lose their self-control.

## CHAPTER 5

## A Well-Devised Plan

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BACK at the Cavalry Command Centre, the sweet memory of Qin Qing is still lingering in Xiang Shaolong's mind.

And he was annoyed.

Hasn't he sworn not to be involved in relationships anymore?

Due to Shan Rou's news, he was in a terrible mood and did not sleep at all last night. Coupled with his unclear mind

from all the wine he drank, he became irrational and unconsciously flirted with Qin Qing.

Humans are unpredictable. Even he cannot explain his own actions.

If Qin Qing is her usual impenetrable self and censured him soundly, it may not be so bad. However, this chaste and pure beauty is warming up to him.

Her retorts are filled with secret delight and her rejections filled with secret acceptance.

The unique relationship between them is the most tempting factor.

Lost in his daydreaming, he bumped into Jing Jun at the main gate. Jing Jun secretly whispered, "Third Brother! We caught a big fish last night!"

Xiang Shaolong was puzzled, "What big fish?"

Jing Jun proudly declared, "Have you heard of this man named Lu Bang?"

Xiang Shaolong sobered up and inquired in a low voice, "Is he one of Lu Buwei's men?"

Jing Jun explained, "Not only is he one of the traitors from Lu, he is the son of Lu Xiong. Somehow, this fella was attracted to someone's wife and tried to harass her. Coincidentally, Xu Xian was passing by and saved her. The couple has left the City quickly to avoid them but this kid still harbours ill intention and did not give up. He led several

family warriors out of the city in pursuit. They caught up with them, beat the husband up and were about to rape the wife when I caught up to them. They have all been arrested. Ha! Is this fish big enough?"

Xiang Shaolong was curious, "How did you know they were up to no good?"

Jing Jun was on cloud nine about his accomplishment. He laughed, "It is all thanks to Tao Fang's intelligence unit. The moment they knew about this, they told me about it. I am familiar with Lu Bang's character. If he is onto something, he will go all out to achieve it. I therefore assigned someone to trail him and caught him red-handed. This is going to be exciting. Qin has strict laws regarding sex criminals. If we send him to the law bureau, he will be heavily punished. It would be great if he is castrated. Lu Xiong would be devastated and we would have taken some revenge for Princess Qian."

Xiang Shaolong pondered on this for a while and questioned, "Where is Lu Bang being held and do people from the Premier Residence know about this?"

Jing Jun led him past the main hall and towards the back hall. He happily reported, "Last night, I secretly brought everyone back here, including the young couple. Lu Bang and his men are now in prison. Ai! There is a problem here. That kid is denying everything and the couple are terrified to know that their attackers are from Premier Residence. They did not want to provide evidence of their crime and kept pleading

me to release them, saying that they will never come back to Xianyang City in the future.”

Xiang Shaolong was agonized. Without witnesses, Lu Bang can instead accuse him power abuse and he will be in trouble. He asked, “Where is Second Brother?”

Jing Jun sighed, “Since morning, he has been in a horrible mood. He slapped Lu Bang heavily after the interrogation barely began. Now, he is interrogating the young couple. I am really afraid he will resort to violence.”

Xiang Shaolong understood Teng Yi’s character well. He panicked, “Let’s check on him first!”

They increased their pace towards the inner hall where the couple is being held.

Before they stepped over the door ledge, Teng Yi’s loud scolding can be heard. The men guarding the doors have a helpless look on their faces, signalling that the interrogation has been unfruitful.

Xiang Shaolong entered the inner hall and was startled at the sight of the young couple in front of Teng Yi. The young couple exclaimed, “Benefactor!”

Xiang Shaolong was amazed at the coincidence. It is the young couple he helped when he was on his way to meet with Tu Xian. He saved them in the market when they were chased by thugs and even gave them a large sum of money.

Teng Yi was stunned, “You know Official Xiang?”

Xiang Shaolong sincerely pleaded, "Let's talk about that later! Mister and Madam have been assaulted by evil doers and why don't you testify against them? We must not let them remain free and cause more trouble to other people."

This man named Zhou and his wife exchange a glance and resolutely promised, "We will do as Benefactor advised without the slightest hesitation."

Teng Yi cheered, "Both of you need not worry. I will get someone to bring you safely far away from here."

Xiang Shaolong simply added, "By tomorrow morning, both of you will be far away from danger."

By now, he has a good plan to deal with Lu Xiong.

Lu Xiong is one of the culprits behind Zhao Qian's death. He will surely take advantage of this golden opportunity to take revenge.

After Xiao Pan finish hearing his story, he frowned, "The only criminal is Lu Bang. Moreover, he did not violate the woman yet. At the most, we can give him a severe beating."

Li Si smiled, "I think Commander Xiang has thought of a special plan already!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "Nothing can hide from Official Li's eyes. I planned to leak the news to Lu Xiong, deceiving him that his son has raped and killed a woman. If he panics and barges into the Cavalry Command Centre to save his son, I have a way to trick him."



Xiao Pan thought it over and slowly asked, "What kind of a man is this Lu Xiong?"

Xiang Shaolong and Li Si exchanged a glance of amazement.

The Crown Prince Zheng is becoming more formidable and is developing his own thinking style and observations.

Xiang Shaolong leisurely explained, "This is a man who takes shortcuts to success and is an idiot who good at claiming credit for himself. Since he came to Qin, he has been the second most important man among Lu Buwei's clansmen. He is so arrogant that it is rumoured that he does not pay respects to Guan Zhongxie despite being the assistant Imperial Infantry Commander."

Xiao Pan was stunned, "Why is Subject Xiang so familiar with Premier Residence's developments?"

Xiang Shaolong will naturally protect his spy Tu Xian and casually mentioned, "Lu Buwei can bribe my warrior and I can do the same."

Xiao Pan contemplated for a while and gingerly state; "If Lu Xiong is as what you had described, we can make use of him."

He turned to Li Si and instructed, "Subject Li please summon Lu Buwei, Lu Gong, Xu Xian, Wang Ling, Meng Ao, Cai Ze, Wang Wan and various officials for a meeting. I want to deprive Lu Xiong of any mental support and make him even more reckless."

Li Si was pleased and left to execute his order.

Xiao Pan waited until only Xiang Shaolong and himself was left in the study before he happily cheered, "It will be even better if this matter is blown out of proportion. I can use this chance to show my authority and put down Lu Buwei. This traitor has been even more overbearing now that he has the support of Empress. He even proposed to Empress to promote himself to be the Regent of Qin. What a shameless cad!"

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "What did Empress say?"

Xiao Pan furiously disclosed, "Empress has been bewitched by Lao Ai. Except for matters regarding Master, she approves all his other requests. She has spoken to me twice regarding this matter already. Ai! I have been unable to sleep for the past two nights because of this as well."

Xiang Shaolong recalled that in the movie, people addressed Lu Buwei as Premier Mentor. 'Mentor' refers to a kind of officials that is found in the state of Qi which can also mean 'Father.' This will give Lu Buwei some sort of promotion and hint at his fatherly status. He could not help laughing, "Let's make him a Premier Mentor instead and create more trouble for him."

Xiao Pan was elated and asked for the details.

Xiang Shaolong added, "This must be done after the blood test or it will have the opposite effect."

He explained the meaning of Premier Mentor and its double meaning as well.

Xiao Pan frowned, "Isn't that asking me to acknowledge a traitor as my father?"

Xiang Shaolong casually mentioned, "This is just a name without real authority and we have two advantages from this promotion. First, we assured this traitor of his position and he will not make any more ridiculous requests. Secondly, we can increase the dissatisfaction of Lu Gong and the military. With evidence that you are not his son, they will assume that he gave himself that title and will give him more trouble."

Xiao Pan was shocked, "How can Master leisurely think of such a unique position?"

Xiang Shaolong was slightly awkward, "I am not sure too. The name just came up me all of a sudden."

Xiao Pan stared at him for a while and gently remarked, "Let me think about this further. Master! It is not that I do not trust you but this is an important issue and I want to hear Li Si's opinion."

Xiang Shaolong was pleased, "I am more than happy to know that Crown Prince is taking up the responsibility of his own decision making. Seeing you grow up to be a great man is my greatest reward."

He stood up and bade farewell, "By now, Lu Xiong should have received my news. I should head back to handle him."

Xiao Pan stood up and stammered, "Can Master pay a visit to Empress? Only you can make Mother break out of Lao Ai's control."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "I'll see what I can do!"

Stepping out of the study, he was detained by Lord Changwen. Lord Changwen apologised, "Shaolong, please forgive me for divulging your whereabouts. My sister is waiting for you outside the palace. Hei! You should know that she is up to no good."

Xiang Shaolong is in a rush to return to the Cavalry Commander Centre to implement his trap to trick Lu Xiong. He was astounded, "Then I had better leave by another exit."

It is Lord Changwen's turn to be astounded. He begged, "You must never do that or they will know that I tipped you off. Please go and humour them a bit! Take it that you are doing it on account of our friendship. I will buy you drinks tonight as a form of gratitude."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "I have only heard of fathers doting their children but never heard of brothers doting their sister."

Lord Changwen smiled bitterly and replied in a low voice, "I can see that my sister has a favourable impression of Shaolong. Of course she does! She may not admit it but I can tell it from her joyful expression last night. I have very sharp eyes! Ha! She is a good catch!"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and smiled weakly, "It's not funny. Let's see what she is up to."

They continued chatting as they walked towards the palace gates. When they went through the corridor and was about to reach the palace gates, Lord Changwen slipped away.

Xiang Shaolong hardened his resolve and stride towards the Eighteen Guardians who were waiting for him. From afar, he caught sight of Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er the two stubborn Qin girls. They were trying out his horse Jifeng. Wu Shu and the other Guardians could only stare at them helplessly.

Ying Ying noticed him coming and whipped the horse, riding towards him, chirping, "Good day General Xiang. We are not convinced by your prowess and are coming to challenge you again."

Admiring her stubborn, cute and youthful demeanour, Xiang Shaolong wished he could leap up the horse, embrace her slender waist, lean against the back of her body and ride one big round around the city. Unfortunately, it can only be a fantasy. He bitterly smiled, "When can this come to a conclusion?"

Jifeng stopped beside him and stretched its long neck, nuzzling him.

Xiang Shaolong lovingly hugged Jifeng and led the horse with Ying Ying on it back to Lu Dan'er and the Guardians. He bitterly laughed, "I surrender. Can Miss have mercy on me and let me go?"

Ying Ying was displeased, "How can you go back on your word? Aren't you a mighty hero? I don't care; you are coming with us to compete on horse riding followed by other contests."

Lu Dan'er welcomed with a smile, "When have you become another coward!"

Xiang Shaolong almost exploded. He had a brainwave and suggested, "Fine. I will compete with you but first of all, let me return to the Command Centre and run an errand. After that, I will play with you girls."

Ying Ying agilely jumped off the horse and exclaimed, "Who is playing with you? I just saw that you may have some small abilities and wanted to see for myself how good you really are."

Lu Dan'er added, "Men are all like that. When you treat them well, they think they are very important. Hei! Smart-ass!"

Xiang Shaolong acted like he did not care and declared, "If you don't allow me to return to the Command Centre, I will not compete with you. If you don't treasure it, too bad!"

Both girls were surprised, "Treasure?"

Roaring with laughter, Xiang Shaolong leapt up his horse and bellowed, "Whatever! Brothers, let's head back to the Centre."

His legs dug lightly into Jifeng and he galloped towards the main gate.

When Xiang Shaolong and the two stubborn girls jumped down the horse, they can all sense that something is going on in the Command Centre.

The area outside the main hall was crowded with Cavalry soldiers and everyone has an angry look on their faces. Sounds of scolding can be heard coming from inside the hall.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad and led the girls into the hall. The soldiers saw that Xiang Shaolong has returned and made way for him. Someone whispered, "Commander, someone from the Imperial Infantry is causing trouble here."

'Imperial Commander is here!' was announced. Accompanied by the two girls, Xiang Shaolong was feeling excited as he stepped into the hall.

The hall was split into two groups.

On one side were Teng Yi, Jing Jun and ten over cavalry leaders. On the other side were Lu Xiong and twenty odd Infantry escort soldiers.

Xiang Shaolong winked and the Eighteen Guardians fanned out and surrounded Lu Xiong's group.

Lu Xiong did not even turn around and coldly laughed, "The man who can speak is finally back."

These words matched Lu Xiong's attitude and mindset. He did not regard General Xiang Shaolong who is ranked two ranks higher than him. In fact, he did not even regard him at all.

Ying Ying is naturally familiar with the Qin military. She leaned towards Xiang Shaolong's ear and whispered, "Aren't the Infantry under your control?"

With her scent and breath on his ear, Xiang Shaolong was feeling ticklish and yet comfortable at the same time. He softly replied, "The two of you stay here obediently. Do not let them know that you are here. I will need you to be my witnesses."

The girls are delighted and did not take offence at his commanding tone. They squeezed into the crowd.

Once they are in place, Xiang Shaolong sauntered up and stopped between Teng Yi and Jing Jun. Facing Lu Xiong whose face is as dark as charcoal, he feigned surprise, "Official Lu mentioned 'the man who can speak', may I know who he is?"

Teng Yi and Jing Jun wanted to aggravate him and purposely laughed in response. The other cavalry soldiers followed their example and laughed as well.

His eyes flashing with murder and anger, Lu Xiong hissed, "Of course I am referring to Commander Xiang. Aren't you a man who can speak?"

Xiang Shaolong's eyes focused on him and harshly roared, "How dare you!"

The entire hall became completely silent and the atmosphere became very tense.



Lu Xiong can never imagine Xiang Shaolong to be rude to him as he is an important figure of the Premier Residence. His face changing colour, he realised that he had said something wrong and undeserving of his military rank. He was lost for words.

Xiang Shaolong simply threatened, "Lu Xiong, you saw me and did not salute me. This is disrespectful. You even pass rude comments and disregard military subordination. Are you aware of your wrongdoing?"

The arrogant Lu Xiong has his own methods. He coldly laughed, "If Commander felt that I have committed a wrongdoing, he may feel free to complain to Premier Lu."

Every cavalry soldier began to protest.

Jing Jun cheekily asked, "If you are sent to war, will you only report to Premier Lu and nobody else? Is he the only person who can command you? Are you going to send someone to Xianyang City to ask him regarding every single thing?"

The Cavalry soldiers burst out laughing again. Even Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er were giggling too.

Lu Xiong was made into a joke and could not take it lying down. He barked, "Jing Jun, who the hell do you think you are, how dare you..."

Teng Yi interrupted, "If he is nobody, you are even worse off. Both of you are assistant generals but Jing Jun is still half a rank higher than you."

Hearing his words, the hall broke out into laughter again. The two girls even clapped loudly in approval, and nobody is afraid of Lu Xiong anymore.

Lu Xiong and his men have an ugly expression on their faces.

Xiang Shaolong will not allow him to recompose himself. "Lu Xiong, you are too much! Kneel down!" He barked.

Everyone present quietened down and waited for their reaction.

Lu Xiong was shocked and he took a step back. He challenged, "Xiang Shaolong, you better not force me."

Teng Yi knew that the time is right. He ordered, "Men. Apprehend this criminal!"

The Cavalry soldiers had expected this. Over ten men stepped forward.

Originally, all Lu Xiong wanted is to save his own son. Under the ridicule of Xiang Shaolong and his men, he fell into their trap. Moreover, he has been arrogant because he enjoyed the backing of Lu Buwei. With his status, he will not allow himself to be arrested like a common criminal. Jiang! He drew out his sword and like a fool, he wildly challenged, "Who dares to arrest me?"

His men originated from the Lu Family Warriors and are arrogant men who enjoyed Lu Buwei's backing. Unafraid of a simple Cavalry Commander, they drew and brandished their weapons, surrounding and protecting Lu Xiong.

Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and Jing Jun exchanged looks. First, they called back their cavalry soldiers who are waiting to attack. Xiang Shaolong then shook his head and sighed, "If Assistant Commander Lu is not going to drop your weapons and kneel down, acknowledging your mistakes, I will not be merciful."

Lu Xiong grinned, "What can you do to me?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled and gestured with his hand.

The Eighteen Guardians agilely armed themselves with their crossbows that were slanged on their backs. They loaded their crossbows and assumed fighting positions. They aimed their crossbows at the enemies and forced Lu Xiong and his men to a corner.

When they could no longer retreat, Lu Xiong sobered up and stopped his men from withdrawing. He cried, "Xiang Shaolong! What do you mean by this?"

Jing Jun laughed, "The meaning of your swords is the same meaning as our crossbows. What meaning can there be?"

As the atmosphere is very tense, no one dared to make any noise. Only Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er cannot be bothered and giggled at Jing Jun's joke.

Lu Xiong spotted them and questioned in a deep voice, "Who are the two girls?"

A Cavalry Captain shouted, "You did not even know the famous Miss Ying Ying and Miss Lu Dan'er. What kind of Assistant Commander are you?"

Lu Xiong was flabbergasted and felt that he is at a serious disadvantage.

If there were only Cavalry soldiers around, he can deny everything regardless of his mistakes. With these outsiders, he is really in trouble.

Xiang Shaolong saw his expression changing and knew that he is thinking of backing down. He will not give him any chance to apologise and roared, "If you are not throwing down your weapons and kneeling down, you will regret it!"

He insisted on Lu Xiong kneeling down to make things difficult for him.

Lu Xiong was hesitating for a while. Before he had a chance to reply, Xiang Shaolong ordered, "Shoot their legs!"

The mechanism sounded and eighteen arrows shot out.

With this kind of distance and environment, there is no place to hide. Eighteen of Lu Xiong's followers fell down, all with an arrow wound on their thighs.

The crossbows were reloaded immediately.

Lu Xiong may not be injured but his fighting will is gone. Afraid that Xiang Shaolong may really kill him, he angrily threw down his long sword and cursed, "You are good! I want to see how you are going to account for this to Premier Lu."

The remaining seven of his uninjured followers threw down their swords and surrendered.

Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er did not anticipate that Xiang Shaolong will really attack them and were dazed.

Xiang Shaolong gestured again. The cavalry soldiers crowded forward, tying Lu Xiong and his men up. Lu Xiong and his men were then forced to kneel down.

Within Xianyang City, the Cavalry are considered a prestigious force and will not tolerate these insults. They are impressed and happy with Xiang Shaolong's brave actions.

Ignoring the injured men, Xiang Shaolong faced Lu Xiong and plainly asked, "Assistant Commander Lu, why are you doing all these? Your son only injured a few men and you resort to violence?"

Lu Xiong raised his head in surprise, "What?"

Xiang Shaolong gently reminded, "Didn't you hear what I said? Anyway, it doesn't matter now. We shall see Premier Lu now and see which one of us is disrespectful and insubordinate."

Lu Xiong's face was drained of colour. In the moment, he knew that he had been too reckless and was tricked by Xiang Shaolong's well-devised plan.

## CHAPTER 6

## Shihuang Shows His Might

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

THERE is a Qin court in the west of Xianyang Palace. Xiao Pan is seated on the dragon throne on a platform that was raised three steps above the ground. Li Si the Imperial Librarian is seated behind him.

Empress Zhu Ji is seated one step below him.

The high ranking officials are seated on two rows on each side.

On one side were Lu Buwei, Cai Ze, Wang Wan and Meng Ao; on the other side were Xu Xian, Lu Gong and Wang Ling.

While they were in discussion over the Zhengguo Canal, a serious looking Lord Changping came in to report that Xiang Shaolong seeks an urgent audience. Everyone was caught by surprise.

Xiao Pan had expected this and order Lord Changping to bring Xiang Shaolong in at once.

Xiang Shaolong strode in and paid his respects to everyone. He detailed the entire situation and added, "Initially, this matter falls under my personally responsibility. However, Lu Xiong kept demanding he wanted Premier Lu to judge him. As this matter concerned Premier Lu's reputation, I dare not act rashly and reported this to Crown Prince, Empress and Premier Lu."

Lu Buwei is so angry his face is almost green. He furiously scolded, "Where is that son of a bitch?"

From this sentence, everyone can sense how domineering Lu Buwei is.

Under such a situation, the Crown Prince Xiao Pan should express his views first before others can comment. Apparently, Lu Buwei's comment is tantamount to insubordination.

Moreover, he is scolding Lu Xiong like a parent and not like a high ranking official.

Xiao Pan was prepared and started, "Right Premier need not be angry first; we must first investigate and clarify all the details."

He turned to Zhu Ji and inquired, "Empress! Am I doing it correctly?"

Zhu Ji looked down at the awe-inspiring Xiang Shaolong and her eyes are filled with mixed emotions. Noticing Lu Buwei also winking non-stop at her, she slowly sighed, "Yes. We shall let you decide."

Under such circumstances, she can only support her beloved son.

Lu Gong and Xu Xian were stunned that this young Crown Prince is capable of handling such a complicated case.

Everyone can tell that this is actually a clash between Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong. It can be an easy or complicated case.

Xiao Pan suppressed his delight and ignored Lu Buwei. To Xiang Shaolong, he calmly enquired, "Lu Bang did not successfully committed his act as he was stopped but this attempted rape is still a serious crime. Does Subject Xiang have any witnesses?"

Xiang Shaolong responded, "The young couple are right outside the hall. We can summon them and Crown Prince can question them."

Cai Ze interrupted, "The Crown Prince's time is precious and need not fret over such a small matter. The law bureau can



handle this case. I suggest that we must first clarify whether Assistant Commander Lu was misled and thus clashed with Commander Xiang. The Imperial Army are two important pillars of our City defences. It is important to maintain good relationships between them and bury the hatchet.”

These words are obviously meant to help Lu Xiong.

Cai Ze is an ex-Premier and is well respected. If this was another case, Xiao Pan may relent but in this case, he will push his way through.

Xu Xian and Lu Gong were about to say something but swallowed their words for the time being.

Lu Buwei’s expression relaxed. Just as everyone except Xiang Shaolong and Li Si expected Xiao Pan to accept Cai Ze’s suggestion, this future Qin Shihuang slammed his armrest and stood up. He stepped down to Zhu Ji’s front and coldly retorted, “Subject Cai’s words make no sense! Since Qin has undergone Shang Yang’s reforms, we hold military law as our top priority. The strict chain of command and our obedient soldiers have made our Qin army invincible.”

He stepped down even lower to the lowest step and scanned the officials with his sharp eyes and officially state, “If someone violates the military law and is insubordinate but we did not handle this matter well, it will have further repercussions on the morale of our soldiers. I will judge this case personally. If it is proven that Assistant Commander Lu is guilty, we will punish him according to military law.”

Everyone present was dazed as nobody imagined a young teenager using such strong and domineering words.

Lu Buwei and Zhu Ji reacted as if this is the first time they met Xiao Pan.

Only Lu Si is jumping for joy as these words originated from him.

Lu Gong barked, "Great! This is befitting our Crown Prince. Strict military command with fair rewards and punishment has always been the backbone of our great Qin army."

Xiao Pan smiled but was flustered when everyone is now staring at him. He hurriedly went back to his seat and in a weaker tone, he asked, "Does anyone else have anything to say?"

Cai Ze has been scolded by him and dare not voice his opinions. He lowered his head with dejection.

Lu Buwei was furious and was in a dilemma regarding Xiao Pan. He dared not rebut him as he knew that his words make sense. He could only look towards Zhu Ji and hoped that she will speak up for him.

Zhu Ji knew that Lu Buwei is hinting to her for assistance but because the person involved is Xiang Shaolong, she pretended not to notice his hints.

Meng Ao dryly coughed, "Shaolong and Lu Xiong are people that I am well-acquainted with. By right, such a thing should not have happened. I am guessing that this could arise from the differences between the Cavalry and the Infantry.

Moreover, both men are newly promoted and it can be easy for them to misunderstand each other.”

Zhu Ji finally nodded, “Great General Meng’s words make sense. Crown Prince must conduct this investigation properly and not affect the harmony of the Qin military.”

Lu Buwei was relieved that Zhu Ji finally spoke out. He recommended, “This matter can be handed over to me. I guarantee that all violators will be punished accordingly.”

Xiao Pan, Xiang Shaolong and Li Si were at their wits end. Xu Xian, who has yet to speak, suddenly stood up and came to Xiang Shaolong’s side. He plainly state, “I wish to leave with Shaolong for a minute. When I am back, I will voice my opinions. Will Crown Prince please consent?”

Except for Xiang Shaolong, Li Si and Xiao Pan, everyone else were shocked and wondered what he is up to.

Xiang Shaolong cheerfully left with Xu Xian. Wang Wan wanted to take this opportunity to say something but Xiao Pan raised his hand to stop him, declaring, “Wait till the Left Premier is back!”

Wang Wan did not expect Xiao Pan to be so forceful and swallowed his words.

The Court was strangely quiet.

Everyone could not help looking at Xiao Pan and assessed him as if this is the first time they saw him.

He still resembles a child but is extremely calm and confident. Sitting steadily in his throne, his eyes are shining mysteriously and no one can guess what he is thinking.

Zhu Ji had to admit her own son is now a young man.

For the past few days, she has been indulging with Lao Ai and enjoying the pleasures of the flesh, numbing herself from the harsh realities of life.

In her extraordinary life, the four men who made an impact are King Zhuangxiang, Lu Buwei, Xiang Shaolong and her son. But fate has caused her to share a complicated relationship with these men.

Especially Lu Buwei who poisoned King Zhuangxiang to death and made her very guilty when she faced Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Pan. Now, she must excruciating bear with Lu Buwei to ensure the survival of herself and her son.

Only Lao Ai can make her forget everything.

In this instant, she can feel a big gap between herself and her son. She felt like she did not understand him as well as before.

Lu Buwei is feeling even more ironic.

All along, he has been treating this 'son' affectionately and did his best to cultivate him to be a useful man. In the future, this father and son team can control Qin hand in hand, unite the world and build an everlasting dynasty.

That is one of the reasons he wants to kill Xiang Shaolong; he will not allow Xiao Pan's love for him to be diluted.

Never in his wildest dreams did he expect Xiao Pan to clash with him. In this instant, he clearly felt some sort of conflict.

He has yet to see through that this is all part of an elaborate scheme conjured by Xiang Shaolong, Xiao Pan and Li Si. He simply assumed that Xiao Pan is judging this case based on the justice system.

He is well aware of Lu Xiong's idiocy and incompetence. Otherwise, he will not make Guan Zhongxie the main commander and Lu Xiong as the assistant commander.

Xiang Shaolong's elimination of Zhu Meng is a great blow to him and caused him to have some manpower issues. Now, Lu Xiong is in trouble too.

Now, his main focus is to kill Xiang Shaolong. No one must stand between him and his dream.

Cai Ze and Wang Wan who switched sides to Lu Buwei had a rude awakening and realised that the ultimate authority lies with Xiao Pan and not with Lu Buwei, Empress Ji or the other officials. As he grows up eventually, Xiao Pan will be the official King of Qin.

Meng Ao's thinking is much simpler.

His present success is due to Lu Buwei's support and is fiercely loyal to him. His military prowess is as good as, if not stronger than Wang Ling, making him Lu Buwei's biggest

supporter. Regardless of what might happen, he will definitely stick to Lu Buwei.

Wang Ling's thinking more complicated.

This Great General of Qin is someone who favours war and expansion.

Only by attacking the six states can he fulfil his life purpose. That is the reason he is leaning towards Lu Buwei. Lu Buwei is a courageous risk taker and they have a common goal of annihilating the six states.

Out of a sudden, he can sense that the young King is already exhibiting the same characteristics, ambition and energy, forcing him to reconsider his options.

Lu Gong, the most respected General, is someone who is an advocate of Qin supremacy and hated Lu Buwei from the beginning. Due to Xiang Shaolong, he has ditched his worries and believed that Xiao Pan is King Zhuangxiang's flesh and blood. With Xiao Pan's showing his might, he is even more convinced to support this future King.

With everyone deep in their own thoughts, the room was strangely silent.

In a short while, Xu Xian and Xiang Shaolong returned to the room.

Xiang Shaolong stood beside Wang Ling while Xu Xian proceeded forward to face Xiao Pan.

Xu Xian and Xiang Shaolong paid their respects and Xu Xian started, "I wish to inform Crown Prince and Empress that I can guarantee that this matter is not caused by a misunderstanding between the Cavalry and Infantry."

Lu Buwei is annoyed, "How can Left Premier be so certain?"

In his usual affable manner, Xu Xian disclosed, "In the streets of Xianyang City, Lu Bang did harass the wife of a young man. I happened to pass by personally and stopped him. When I rebuke him, I can already sense that Lu Bang is dissatisfied. Just now, I went out to see if it was the same couple who was involved and it was them indeed. Therefore, it is definitely not the Cavalry soldiers making a false accusation at Lu Bang. There are also credible witnesses who saw Lu Xiong barging into the Cavalry Command Centre to demand for his son. He was also the first one to draw a weapon and disobeyed his superior's orders.

Finally, everyone understood his reason for leaving the room and even Meng Ao is speechless.

Lu Buwei wished he can personally strangle Lu Bang. Despite Xu Xian ticking him off, he still got the guts to carry out this foolish deed.

Xiao Pan coldly snorted, "Lu Bang must have decided to kill the couple after his crime; thus, he wasn't concerned about Left Premier's advice."

Everyone's heart turned cold, knowing that this young Crown Prince has a killing intention.

This is the wondrous part of the plan. With Xu Xian bearing witness, no one would guess that it was Jing Jun who masterminded Lu Bang's capture.

Zhu Ji frowned deeply, "Lu Bang is guilty of his crime but how does Left Premier know that Lu Xiong drew his weapon first and disobeyed his superior's orders?"

Xu Xian plainly state, "Because Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er are present and can verify this."

Lu Gong was stunned, "Why is Little Dan'er there?"

Lu Buwei coldly laughed, "Can Shaolong please explain this strange occurrence?"

Everyone's eyes turned to Xiang Shaolong.

Xu Xian added, "I have questioned Shaolong about this. We need to summon Lord Changwen to give a proper explanation."

Xiao Pan ordered, "Summon Lord Changwen!"

The palace guard at the door left to summon Lord Changwen.

Receiving his order, Lord Changwen rushed over and paid his respects to everyone. He continued to reveal that Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er detained Xiang Shaolong at the palace gates and wanted him to compete with them.

Lu Buwei's expression became very ugly. He stepped out and kneeled down, pleading, "Lu Xiong is my man and it is my fault that he is insubordinate. Please punish me instead."



Even Xiang Shaolong is caught unaware by this turn of event. Lu Buwei has shouldered the blame on himself and Zhu Ji will not allow Xiao Pan to make things difficult for Lu Buwei.

Zhu Ji expectedly interrupted, "Premier please rise. Allow me to speak to the Crown Prince before we pass judgement."

Lu Buwei knew that Zhu Ji will protect him from Xiao Pan. He continued kneeling and 'agonizingly' exclaimed, "Empress need not say more. I deserved to be punished!"

Zhu Ji secretly cursed him for putting on such an act but was helpless at the same time. She whispered to Xiao Pan, "Right Premier has accumulated many merits and may not be able to control his large forces well. Crown Prince must be lenient."

Xiao Pan was expressionless and silent for some time while everyone sat there anticipating his judgement. Ultimately, he declared, "With Right Premier's intervention, father and son Lu Xiong may be spared from death. But this matter concerns our military morale and everyone including Lu Xiong will be sacked from their military positions and can never rejoin the army. Lu Bang will be sentenced to fifty strokes of the pole for his attempted crime. As Lu Xiong's direct supervisor, Guan Zhongxie did not set a good example and will be demoted by one rank. The Imperial Infantry Commander will be assigned to Commander Xiang for the time being. Right Premier, please rise."

Zhu Ji is completely blown away and Lu Buwei is completely swept off his feet. He unsteadily stood up and forgot to give his thanks.

Xiang Shaolong went forward and kneeled down, accepting his assignment. He secretly thought that this multiple combo attack which gave him control over the Imperial Infantry must have come from Li Si.

Xiao Pan fiercely stood up and coldly barked, "This matter shall be decided then. Court dismissed!"

Everyone kneeled down immediately.

Xiao Pan helped Zhu Ji up and they left with Li Si under the escorts of the palace guards.

Xiang Shaolong was experiencing mixed emotions. He knew that he, like the other generals and officials, have finally felt the forceful and suffocating aura of the future Qin Shihuang.

And he is still a teenager.

To avoid Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er, he intentionally left with Lu Gong, Xu Xian and Wang Ling.

The moment they stepped out of the hall, Lu Buwei and Meng Ao are waiting for them. When they saw Xiang Shaolong, Lu Buwei assured, "Lu Xiong is the culprit behind this incident. The Crown Prince may have let him off lightly but I will censure him myself. Shaolong need not hold it against him anymore."

Lu Gong and the other generals were surprised at Lu Buwei's forthcoming attitude.

Only Xiang Shaolong knew that Lu Buwei is determined to kill him at the three-day hunting fair that begins the day after tomorrow, which is why he is putting up a friendly demeanour. Mo Ao and Guan Zhongxie's assassination plan must be a flawless one that will take his life for sure.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be embarrassed and apologised, "I am no other choice and seek Premier Lu's forgiveness."

Lu Buwei laughed loudly and chatted casually with Lu Gong and the rest. He then accompanied Xiang Shaolong out of the palace, leaving Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er staring at him furiously and helplessly.

Observing Lu Buwei's friendly manner as if nothing had happened, Xiang Shaolong was secretly in admiration.

The most powerful strategy is to hide a knife behind your smile!

## CHAPTER 7

## Hope At Death's Door

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

LU BUWEI insisted on sending Xiang Shaolong home. Resistance is futile and he joined him in his luxurious carriage.

His carriage drove past the almost completed new Premier Residence. Lu Buwei proudly pointed, "After the hunting fair, I will move to this place with the best Fengshui in Xianyang City. But Mister Zou mentioned that after eight years, the Fengshui will move into Xianyang Palace. Ha! That is the

same time as the Crown Prince coronation. What a coincidence!”

Xiang Shaolong knew nuts about Fengshui and acted according to his knowledge of history. Upon hearing this news, he was in shock and dare not belittle Zou Yan the astrologer and philosopher.

Lu Buwei stretched lazily and smiled, “With eight years of good luck, I can accomplish many things!”

Xiang Shaolong was full of admiration. Lu Buwei had just been defeated but he is truly not bothered. Like a shrewd businessman, he did not mind losing out this once as he has other means of fighting back.

Lu Buwei suddenly hugged his shoulder intimately and smiled, “The new Premier Residence has everything except a good son-in-law. Shaolong should understand my intention! Now that you have seen Niangrong, I believe you would agree with me that she is an excellent catch! She is my favourite daughter.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. This is the last time he can mend fences with Lu Buwei.

Originally a businessman, this Qin Premier cooperated with him because there are benefits to be reaped. Next, he tried to kill him because he will benefit from his death. Presently, he is trying to secure his loyalty again to benefit himself.

He is a man who is focused on benefits and power. Everything else is unimportant.

If it was anybody else, that person would bear some grudges after being defeated. Lu Buwei did not bear any grudges at all but treated Xiang Shaolong even better than before.

From these, he concluded that even if he became his son-in-law, he can still be a sacrificial pawn in the political game. Lu Xiong is an example.

Xiang Shaolong can almost feel that Lu Buwei wanted to turn Qin into his own country via Xiao Pan. He may even want to be the King of Qin one day.

Lu Buwei saw that he did not reject outright and thought that he was tempted. Patting his shoulder, he added, "Think about it! Give me an answer the next time we meet. No matter what, I will punish Lu Xiong that idiot."

The carriage came to a halt and they have arrived at the main gate of the Command Centre.

Xiang Shaolong gave his thanks and dismounted from his carriage. He is very confident that Lu Buwei will ask him for his reply during the hunting fair. If his answer is 'no', he will proceed to assassinate him.

Back at the Command Centre, everyone is full of praise and respect for him. Xiang Shaolong realised that Xiao Pan had gained the respect of the Qin Court and he had gained the respect of the Imperial Army. In the future, no one will dare to question his authority.

Teng Yi and Jing Jun had returned earlier. The moment they saw each other, they could not help but have a good laugh.

Lu Xiong's career is over and it is more satisfying than killing him.

Teng Yi stopped laughing and officially state, "Even Guan Zhongxie the Infantry Commander has been demoted. This kid must have a lot of scores to settle with Lu Buwei."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "We will soon be fighting him openly as he had just brought up the marriage proposal again. He must have an answer by the next time we meet."

Jing Jun blinked, "That Lu Nianrong is quite attractive. Why don't you marry her first for fun and take revenge at the same time?"

Teng Yi furiously barked, "What kind of person do you think Third Brother is?"

Jing Jun shut up at once.

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "This is a troublesome issue. If we reject him, Lu Buwei will attack us but I cannot be bothered anymore."

Teng Yi was about to say something when an attendant reported that Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er are here to harass him again.

Xiang Shaolong and the two girls rode out of the city along the official roads. Riding down a slope, they came to a piece of flat grassland. It is the middle of Spring and the grass is jade green. With these two stubborn but beautiful girls accompanying him, all his worries disappeared and he was in high spirits.

Ying Ying rode cheerfully to his side and pointed to a hill nearby, stating, "That is Horse-resting hill. On the hill is a tall and ancient cypress tree with a spring beside it. That shall be our finishing line and whoever reaches first shall be the winner. For the next three months, the loser must pay obeisance to the winner every time they meet."

On his other side, Lu Dan'er giggled, "Of course it is not a simple horse race. You can use any method to prevent your opponent from winning but the rider and horse must not be injured. Do you understand?"

Xiang Shaolong was astounded, "The horse will sprint very quickly and how can there be any time to attack the opponent?"

Ying Ying shot him a look and used her long legs to dig into her horse's stomach and rode off. She smiled like the Spring wind, "How would I know?"

Lu Dan'er sped off at the same time.

Xiang Shaolong is used to their 'ruthless methods' and did not have time to complain about their 'false start'. He rode Jifeng and began to chase them.

In terms of horse riding, he only learnt about it when he came to these ancient times. Compared to Wang Jian who can eat and sleep on horseback, he is far behind. But in terms of speed, he can easily win them with Jifeng. He thought about the girls helping him to trap Lu Xiong and did not mind losing to them and make them happy in the



process. After all, paying respects to pretty girls is something fun to him.

With this mindset, he lost the will to fight and rode leisurely towards the goal, trailing the tails of the two horses in front of him.

He gradually left the grasslands behind.

Xiang Shaolong could not help but think about Zhao Ya.

If he can really kill Tian Dan and avenge Shan Rou, she should be in Xianyang City by the time he comes back.

After so many twists and turns, he must treat her well and provide her with a comfortable life for the rest of her days.

In front of him, the two girls rode into a forest.

Xiang Shaolong turned his thoughts to Qin Qing.

Love is a funny thing. Opposites do attract which best describes their relationship. They need not be in an official relationship; all they need is the special feeling whenever they meet and the excitement of eating the forbidden fruit. If they can stay like this forever, it would be perfect. The problem is one day, they may cross the line and it will be too late for regrets.

In the 21st century, he would never stutter in front of a beautiful girl. But the inevitable has happened, showing how much he has changed.

Deep in his thoughts, he came to the forest and entered it.

Occasionally, he caught sight of the back of the two girls.

Ladies of these historical times mature very early. It may be due to them getting married at fourteen years old which is very normal. Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er are barely fifteen or sixteen but are like flowers in full blossom. Moreover, they have picked up horse riding, sword fighting and archery skills. With a good figure, they are more enticing compared to girls from the six states. He would be lying if he said he is not tempted by them.

But Xiang Shaolong had no desire to be involved with them.

Firstly, he had no desire to get involved in new relationships, especially with Lu Dan'er. She is one of the girls shortlisted to marry Xiao Pan. If he gets involved with her, it is equivalent to him competing with Xiao Pan.

This is not the 21st century where people have one night stands. Additionally, she comes from a prestigious family. Anyone who made love to her must be responsible for marrying her. What Xiang Shaolong fears the most now is responsibility to pretty ladies. The only exception is Qin Qing, whom he is troubled over.

Still thinking about her, he suddenly felt something was amiss.

He caught sight of a black figure from the corner of his eye and he looked over in that direction. A net was thrown towards his head and the attacker was hiding behind a short tree.

Xiang Shaolong could have unsheathed Bloodwave and chopped at the net.

But the net suddenly tightened and was intertwined with Bloodwave. The net continued to pull Bloodwave away from him.

Xiang Shaolong was amused. Even if the two girls combined their strength, they are no match for him.

Without thinking, he pulled hard at the sword and wanted to cut the net into two.

Like a bolt out of nowhere, an unbeatable strong force pulled back and Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted. He fell down his horse with his sword and landed squarely on his face.

A rider-less Jifeng galloped a few steps forward and stopped. It turned back and looked at Xiang Shaolong with a quizzical look on its face.

The opponent continued to pull very hard. Helplessly, Xiang Shaolong had to let go and lost his sword.

Shrill giggles of the two girls can be heard from the bushes.

Xiang Shaolong realised that they had used the horse's strength to steal his sword. Exasperated, he continued to lie on the grass and gazed up at the blue sky and white clouds.

Soon, the two attractive girls appeared by his side. Bending down to look at their defeated opponent, they were still laughing hysterically with satisfaction.

Ying Ying chirped, "You are so useless. Next time, we will not be bothered with you."

Xiang Shaolong could feel that his body is tired. Lying comfortably, he smiled, "You are ignoring me for good? Nothing can be better than that."

Lu Dan'er placed Bloodwave beside his face and unhappily retorted, "Smart-ass. Do you think we longed after you? I wonder why Ji Yanran married you. You cannot even protect your own sword."

Ying Ying stomped her feet whining, "Dan'er! Why are you still talking to him? Are you deaf? He said it would be great if we ignore him. Let's go! I never want to see him again."

Lu Dan'er is still hesitating when the incensed Ying Ying dragged her away.

When the galloping sounds have faded, Jifeng came back to him. It lowered its head and stared at him.

Xiang Shaolong sat up with a bitter smile. It is better this way but he still feared that they will make trouble for him.

Ying Ying could not stand his joke as she had high regards and expectations of him. Therefore, she was especially angry.

In this instant, Jifeng was alerted and its ears straightened.

His sixth sense told him something was wrong. He slapped Jifeng on the rump and roared, "Go!"

Jifeng could understand him due to their constant interaction. It galloped non-stop away from him.

Simultaneously, Xiang Shaolong rolled behind the small tree where the two girls were hiding earlier.

The crossbow mechanism can be heard.

Ten over arrows whished through the forest.

By then, Xiang Shaolong had rolled out from the other side and is now behind a giant tree. From his waist, he retrieved two flying needles.

His attackers must have followed them from the city. When the two girls have left, they made their move.

He was caught unprepared as he did not expect Lu Buwei to ambush him right now. If he was killed, he will be the main suspect.

Swishing sounds were heard and an arrow came flying at him from the left.

Xiang Shaolong quickly evaded. The arrow flew past his face and embedded itself in the tree behind him. It was a close shave.

He somersaulted and continued to roll toward the archer.

Hiding behind a tree, the masked attacker was about to load another arrow when Xiang Shaolong's Bloodwave has pierced his body.

From the corner of his eyes, he saw some human silhouettes. He did not have time to turn around and shot out his flying needles. Two tragic cries were heard one after another.

Xiang Shaolong knew he cannot stop moving and rolled into another bush. Four arrows shot past the place he used to stand, showing how ruthless and desperate his attackers are.

Listening to the footsteps behind him, Xiang Shaolong counted at least twenty enemies.

He sheathed his long sword and retrieved two flying needles in each hand. He shot the needles behind him based on the footsteps he heard.

A tragic cry was heard behind him. Out of the four needles, one found its target.

The enemies hurriedly took cover.

Until now, they have only used crossbows against him. It is fortunate that they feared his flying needles and dared not act rashly. Otherwise, he would have been killed.

But this is not good enough. With so many enemies against him, he will also die if they managed to surround him.

His only escape is through Jifeng whom he had chased away. If he can get on horseback, he has a chance to escape.

Xiang Shaolong continued to roll forward and was about to reach another tree when his thigh was in excruciating pain. An arrow had grazed his thigh, taking away large chunks of his pants, skin and flesh. Fresh blood began to pour out of his wound. He grunted and moved behind the tree.

Loud footsteps can be heard.

Xiang Shaolong looked behind him and saw another masked man pouncing at him with his crossbow. He frantically shot out another flying needle.

The man was hit on the face and fell backwards. His arrow shot aimlessly into the air.

Another three arrows were shot at him. Luckily, he had shrank back in time.

Fresh blood flowed out of his wound uncontrollably and he was in great pain.

Xiang Shaolong knew that this is a crucial moment. He gathered his will to survive and forcefully rolled forward and hid behind a pile of rocks. His head started to swirl and he knew that it is a sign of losing too much blood. He quickly drew out a dagger and cut a portion of his long sleeve, using the sleeve to bandage his wound.

Rustling sounds were heard as the enemies neared his hiding place.

Xiang Shaolong was depressed. His injured leg will restrict his movement and he will be surrounded by the assassins before he can meet up with Jifeng.

In this instant, he saw a tripping rope tied between two trees.

Xiang Shaolong's mind was turning over furiously. He guessed that this must be the second trap Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er had laid for him. He looked closer and saw another two tripping ropes further down the road.

The footsteps are getting closer.

Xiang Shaolong is exhilarated and annoyed at the same time. He was glad that Jifeng did not come this way and that this is his only chance of escape. Motivated, he jumped up and ran madly ahead. Concurrently, he whistled to summon Jifeng.

Swishing sounds were heard.

Xiang Shaolong leapt over the tripping ropes and rolled forward.

Arrows flew past his head.

He bounced up and Jifeng's galloping sounds can be heard.

A whistle was heard behind him and the enemies begin to run after him without any reservations.

Xiang Shaolong weaved in and out of the trees and pushed his speed to the maximum, luring the enemies to fire their crossbows.

Reloading a crossbow is a troublesome chore which may even require using one's legs. After firing a shot, the enemies must stop temporarily to reload. If they did not want to lose sight of him, they must put their crossbows aside and focus on the chase.

Without the threat of the crossbows, it is now a running competition.

Jifeng suddenly appeared a hundred yards ahead on his left and galloped towards him.



Due to his thigh injury, Xiang Shaolong was limping and his speed is dropping. Fortunately, the crossbows have stopped firing and only running sounds can be heard.

It was followed by cries of surprise. Obviously, they have been tripped by the ropes.

Xiang Shaolong took this opportunity to shout, "The enemies have been trapped. Attack!"

Behind him, the enemies are in chaos.

By now, Jifeng has reached his side. Xiang Shaolong leapt up his horse and galloped away horizontally.

He turned around for a quick glance and saw several masked men who had tripped down. Among those who are still standing, he saw a familiar figure. This figure drew out his long sword and attack Jifeng. His sword stances and strokes are perfect.

Xiang Shaolong used his own sword to block his attack and laughed loudly, "Dan Chu is indeed worthy of being Chancellor's Tian top general!"

He dug his heels lightly into Jifeng and rode off like a fleeting cloud.

## CHAPTER 8

## Deeply Intertwined

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

IN the Wu Residence, Teng Yi bandaged his wound personally and observed, "If the arrow is shot an inch higher, Third Brother would not be able to come back alive."

At this juncture, Jing Jun came back and reported, "I finished my checks. Dan Chu has yet to come back and the two stubborn girls are safely home."

Xiang Shaolong frowned and thought aloud, "I am dead sure one of the Qin Court officials tipped Tian Dan off. Otherwise, he would not have found such an excellent opportunity."

Beside him, Tao Fang nodded, "If Shaolong is killed, everyone will suspect Lu Buwei. Qin will be in chaos."

Jing Jun interrupted, "Will it be Lu Buwei who wanted to kill you through Tian Dan? After you are dead, he will push the blame to someone else!"

Teng Yi countered, "Not likely. The attackers would have killed Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er as well. It is lucky that they left earlier and were not ambushed!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed coldly. His earlier ambush and escape is an once-in-a-lifetime experience. If not for the girls laying the tripping ropes and caused the enemies to lose their footing, he will not be able to survive.

Tao Fang added, "We should count our blessings that the arrows are not laced with poison. It must have been a hasty decision and they did not have much time to prepare. Otherwise, the consequences might be different."

Pausing, he continued, "We must investigate and find out which high-ranking official went to see Tian Dan after the Court was dismissed. We must know who the spy is or we will continue to suffer in his hands."

Xiang Shaolong advised, "It will not be easy! To conceal their secret relationship, they will have a covert communication method that will not be easy to discover."

Teng Yi cut in, "Based on the fact that they managed to guess that Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er will bring you out of the city, this spy has a deep knowledge of Xianyang City affairs

and may even be someone close to them. From this deduction, your assassins are neither Lu Buwei nor Meng Ao.”

Jing Jun was about to voice his opinion when Wu Shu came running in and reported, “There is a letter from the farm!”

Xiang Shaolong was elated and took the bamboo container from him. He opened up the lid and withdrew a letter. As expected, it was the forged letter from Lord Chunshen to Li Yuan.

As everyone scrutinized the letter, they were awe-struck.

Tao Fang inquired, “How does Shaolong plan to hand this letter to Li Yuan?”

Xiang Shaolong smiled, “Prepare the carriage. I have to trouble you people to support me to visit Lu Gong.”

When he got down the carriage and his injured foot touched the ground, sharp pain shot right into his heart. Xiang Shaolong kicked himself for being too complacent.

Wu Yanzhu and another Guardian Jing Bieli hurriedly supported him on both sides. Together, they slowly moved towards Lu Gong’s main hall.

The gatekeepers looked at him with astonishment.

With a bitter smile on his face, Xiang Shaolong crossed the door ledge and sat down in the inner hall. The two Guardians left and waited for him beyond the doors.

A servant girl served tea and secretly peeped at him, wanting to say something but held her tongue at the last moment.

Xiang Shaolong was curious and wanted to ask her what she wanted to say. A yellow silhouette flew in suddenly like the wind and sat down opposite him with a complacent look on her face. Of course it is Lu Dan'er.

Her lips were curled up and she proudly teased, "To think the high and mighty Imperial Cavalry Commander had a simple fall but broke his leg. What a joke and an embarrassment."

Xiang Shaolong gazed at her arrogant face and bitterly smiled, "Didn't you girls decide to leave me alone? Why is Miss Dan'er so interested in me now?"

Lu Dan'er was slightly stunned and countered, "Who is interested in you? It is you who come over to my house and yet you dare to sprout such nonsense?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "It is my fault. Miss Dan'er, please do not be angry anymore."

Lu Dan'er was boiling mad and stared viciously at him. To the maid who was giggling at the side, she barked, "What are you looking at! Get lost!"

The servant girl panicked and quickly left in a flustered manner.

The atmosphere became awkward as neither of them knew what to say. Lu Dan'er is speechless for a while when Xiang

Shaolong's heart softened and started another conversation, "The day after tomorrow is the hunting fair. Has Miss Dan'er finished your preparations?"

Lu Dan'er acted as if she cannot be bothered, "Who are you to mind my business? Hng! You do not know what is good what for and even made Sister Ying cry. I will never let you off."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed, "What?"

Lu Dan'er is even angrier, "What what? Who do you think you are? Must we come and beg you? How I wish I can kill you with one stroke."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly shocked. Like Qin Qing the untouchable beauty, Lu Dan'er is also untouchable as she is shortlisted to marry the Crown Prince.

The opposite of love is hatred.

For these proud girls from prestigious families, they cannot tolerate people being indifferent towards them, especially people whom they admired.

He was dumbfounded for a moment when Lu Gong came in.

Lu Dan'er whispered, "Xiang Shaolong! You'll pay for this!" and slipped away.

Lu Gong sat down on the host chair and shook his head, sighing, "She is a difficult child and sometimes even I cannot control her."

Xiang Shaolong can only smile weakly in reply.

Lu Gong solemnly implored, "What happened to your leg? Did Dan'er injure you?"

In a low voice, Xiang Shaolong disclosed his assassination.

Lu Gong blew his top, "How dare Tian Dan try to kill someone in Qin? Are Qin people meant to be bullied by rascals like him?"

Xiang Shaolong added, "It is hard to link this case to him. Moreover, Lu Buwei will shield him."

From his bosom, he retrieved the forged letter and handed it to Lu Gong.

After Lu Gong finished reading, he nodded, "Leave this to me and Li Yuan will receive this letter by tonight. Recently, a guest-advisor from Lord Chunshen's residence has come to visit me. With him delivering this letter, Li Yuan's suspicious will not be raised."

Xiang Shaolong was delighted, "That's wonderful!"

After contemplating, Lu Gong uneasily revealed, "Little Dan is really troublesome!"

Xiang Shaolong was astounded, "What is your granddaughter up to?"

Lu Gong revealed, "For the past few days, Little Dan visited Guan Zhongxie besides you. She is full of praise for his sword skills and character. In addition, that man is good at sweet-talking young girls. Shouldn't I be worried?"

Xiang Shaolong's spirits sank when he heard this. He frowned, "Isn't her marriage decided by you?"

Lu Gong shook his head, "Since ancient times, Qin has a custom of families staying under the same roof and relied on hunting and fishing as a way of livelihood. Children are taught martial arts from young and it is girls who look for a husband instead of boys looking for a wife. When they have kids, then we talk about getting married. Even with Shang Yang's reforms, there are many old customs that still remain. So if Dan'er is really in love with Guan Zhongxie, there is nothing I can do."

It is Xiang Shaolong's turn to be worried.

This can be the best way for Guan Zhongxie to infiltrate the Qin's circle of trust. If he manages to make love to Lu Dan'er and become Lu Gong's grandson-in-law, Lu Dan'er can no longer marry the Crown Prince and Guan Zhongxie's status will be raised. From then on, he will become a more formidable enemy.

No outsiders can meddle with a love relationship.

Without a single doubt, Guan Zhongxie is a charming man. Even he himself does not have the confidence to win him in this area.

He bitterly smiled, "Didn't you have the intention to marry Miss into the palace?"

Lu Gong sighed, "That is what Xu Xian and Teng Sheng suggested! Dan'er used to accompany Crown Prince in his



studies but lost interest after she got to know Guan Zhongxie. Lu Buwei is devious indeed; now it is hard for me to propose marriage to Empress.”

Lu Gong’s eyes flashed with a murderous aura and added in a deep voice, “I sent someone to warn Guan Zhongxie that I will tear him to pieces if he dares to be involved with Dan’er. I am not afraid of Lu Buwei backing him. The problem is that it was Dan’er who looked for him every time.”

Pausing, he questioned, “Has Shaolong fought him before?”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head.

Lu Gong described, “His swordsmanship is extremely formidable. During Lord Longyang’s farewell banquet last night, he displayed his true abilities and defeated the top swordsman from each state continuously. Even Tian Dan’s personal escort Liu Zhongxia lost to him. It is now rumoured in Xianyang City that he is even better than you and Wang Jian. Hei!”

Xiang Shaolong was agitated, “What does Lu Gong think about his attacks?”

Lu Gong replied in a deep voice, “His sword strokes are very peculiar and countered fast strokes with slow strokes. Compared to your sword skills, I say both of you have an equal chance of winning. But I afraid your arm strength is not as strong as his.”

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to feel the threat of Guan Zhongxie. This martial arts competition must have been

thought of by Mo Ao. This man must be killed soon or he will pose a bigger threat to them.

If he manages to marry both Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er, he will enter the network of the high-ranking officials of Qin. He will be able to give Xiang Shaolong more trouble when that happens.

If Lu Buwei sends him to war and he won some battles and score military contributions, he will be invincible.

Thinking deeper, if he rejected Lu Nianrong's hand in marriage, Lu Buwei will marry her to Guan Zhongxie. He will then rise to become the second in command in the Premier Residence.

Should he get rid of him? This will be a difficult and dangerous task. Or should he have duel with him? But remembering his godly strength and amazing sword skills, Xiang Shaolong was troubled and was in a dilemma.

Leaving Lu Gong's residence, he misses his wives, maids and son but was afraid that they may be worried about his injury and resisted visiting them.

Deep in his heart, he knows that he misses Qin Qing too. Even without bodily contact, he is very satisfied just to see her pretty face, smile and alluring figure.

Back at the Wu residence, Xiang Shaolong updated Teng Yi and Jing Jun about what happened at Lu Gong's residence. When he was talking about Lu Dan'er and Guan Zhongxie, he sighed, "This scheme is unbeatable. Nobody can interfere in

a love relationship. Worse still, Qin ladies are open-minded and are free to choose their husband. Their parents have no say in their marriages.”

Jing Jun was tempted, “Lu Dan’er and Ying Ying are top beauties. If Guan Zhongxie marries them, many men including me will be dissatisfied. Ai! After all, I am also a prestigious Assistant General, why don’t I see them coming to look for me?”

Teng Yi seriously commented, “Let’s stop all these idle chatter. Presently, we do not have time to attend to these affairs. There is one more day left till the hunting fair. We must plan how to kill Mo Ao and at the same time defend ourselves against Lu Buwei’s scheming.”

Xiang Shaolong enquired, “Has Little Jun investigated the hunting grounds?”

Jing Jun happily stood up and took out a cloth map, spreading it on the table. Tao Fang happened to enter the room and joined their secret discussion.

Jing Jun explained, “The hunting area is about one hundred square miles situated between Xianyang City and Mount Liang. Half of the area is grasslands and rivers. The rest are mountainous forests. The camping grounds are based on a small hill east of the hunting grounds nearest to Xianyang City. River Jing flows here from the east to the west. The inspection square is this piece of large grassland below the camps. We have the day hunt and the night hunt. If we want

to kill Mo Ao, naturally the night hunt will provide us with more opportunities.”

Tao Fang was worried, “Shaolong’s leg injury may pose some problems.”

Xiang Shaolong remarked, “This is a battle of wits, not strength. If I am on horseback, my injury will not affect me at all.”

Teng Yi detailed, “There are hunting rules to be observed. No crossbows are allowed and no infighting is tolerated. There are also limits to the number of hunters. The highlight would be the night hunt on the third day. Every unit will send their best hunters to compete their hunting skills in the west hunting mountain. Tigers, leopards and other ferocious animals prowled that area. Whoever can come back with the most number of animal ears will be declared the victor.”

Each unit is referring to each army unit. The Palace guards, Cavalry Guards, Infantry Guards are three individual units. The Lieutenant General Residence, Left and Right Premier residences are all considered as units. The aim of this fair is to promote hunting skills just like an archery competition is used to promote archery skills.

To show their might and prowess, outsiders like Tian Dan will be invited to join and compete.

Jing Jun whined, “Laying the trap is easy, baiting Mo Ao is hard. This man is a genius and it may be hard to trick him.”

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Can you tell me more about the traps?"

Jing Jun excitedly divulged, "One of them is to apply some liquid from the Queen Bee on Mo Ao's body. If he goes near a bee hive, he will be stung to death."

Tao Fang frowned, "But if he is dressed in armour, only his face and hands will be stung. That may not be enough to kill him."

Teng Yi added, "There are some things Master Tao does not know about. In the west hunting mountain, there are ten over hives with poisonous bees. After ten stings, a normal human will faint. After a few more stings, even an immortal cannot save him. The question is how to get him there. He is considered an academic official and need not take part in the hunt. It will be easier to kill Guan Zhongxie."

Tao Fang's face changed colour, "In this case, it will be easy for Lu Buwei to kill Shaolong too."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "Just thinking that Mo Ao is the brains behind my assassination plan, I think it will be hard for me to escape alive. Seems like I must pretend to accept Lu Nianrong's marriage proposal first. When we have killed Mo Ao, we can break our promise."

Teng Yi sighed, "Third Brother is willing to resort to such methods?"

Xiang Shaolong's eyes shone, "We must use tricks in our fight against him or we may suffer huge losses. We can even

use Guan Zhongxie and disrupt his plans. When that happens, we will just act according to circumstances.”

Tao Fang thought of something and reminded, “I nearly forgot. Tu Xian wants to meet you tomorrow evening with news about the latest developments.”

Teng Yi stood up, “It is late! Shaolong should get some rest! If you are limping like this, how can you meet up with Tu Xian secretly?”

With two men supporting him, he returned to his bedroom. He was at a loss.

In his fight against Lu Buwei, he may not be the overall winner but he was in a dilemma regarding Lu Nianrong, Lu Dan’er and Ying Ying. Every one of them is considered a big headache for him.

He could clearly sense that even with Mo Ao out of the way, Guan Zhongxie can still cause him to lose everything he has.

In this moment, all he wishes for is to hug Ji Yanran and the others to sleep. It is too difficult to comprehend his own future.

## CHAPTER 9

## Hatred From Marriage Rejection

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHEN he woke up the next morning, the pain from his injury has been greatly reduced and the swelling has subsided.

Xiang Shaolong was full of praise for Teng Yi's herbal concoction. Teng Yi warned, "For the next two days, you must not exert yourself. If the wound reopens, you will take a longer time to heal."

Xiang Shaolong was inspired, "I have the best excuse against Mo Ao and Guan Zhongxie's assassination plan. I will not

participate in the hunting fair due to my injury. After all, in terms of hunting, every one of you is way better than me.”

Teng Yi smiled, “But many people will be disappointed.”

He added, “There are more news from the farm. Uncle Qing has produced a foldable crossbow according to your suggestion that can be easily hidden inside our clothes. He will need another ten days to complete the prototype.”

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed. The foldable crossbow is as powerful as an ordinary one except that it can be concealed. This is one of his inspirations from his knowledge as a modern 21st century man. With the blacksmiths of Yue working hard, he is able to increase the prowess of his elite forces by another notch.

While he was having breakfast, Lu Buwei sent someone to summon him.

Xiang Shaolong was reminded about Lu Nianrong’s marriage proposal and could feel a giant headache coming. Without a choice, he made his way to the Premier Residence.

At the door of the Premier Residence, he ran into Guan Zhongxie who politely paid his respects and smiled, “I had wanted to find Official Xiang for a drink but was too busy with work. I am so fortunate to run into you today. Since we have met now, why don’t we have dinner together later? We can invite the two brothers Lord Changping and Lord Changwen and have a good time together.”



Due to their complicated relationship, Xiang Shaolong found it hard to decline and agreed. He pretended to apologise, "Because of Lu Xiong, I caused Official Guan to be demoted by one rank. I..."

Guan Zhongxie laughed loudly and pulled him aside. In a low voice, he commented, "Official Xiang need not be bothered about this. Lu Xiong deserves this punishment and no one else is to be blamed. In fact, he is to be blamed for my demotion instead of you."

Xiang Shaolong's heart became icy cold. This man is extremely crafty and even he cannot help but be alarmed.

After fixing a time and place for dinner later, Xiang Shaolong went ahead to see Lu Buwei in the study room.

Lu Buwei is having his breakfast and invited Xiang Shaolong to join him. In a serious tone, he questioned, "I heard from the Infantry guards that Shaolong was assassinated outside the City yesterday evening and was even injured. What is going on and do you know who did it?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "They are all masked men but unless I am mistaken, one of them is Tian Dan's General Dan Chu."

Lu Buwei's face changed colour and pretended to eat his food to hide his emotions.

Xiang Shaolong can understand the reason for his reaction. If Tian Dan had succeeded, Lu Buwei will be the main suspect. This is equivalent to Tian Dan plotting against Lu Buwei.

Xiang Shaolong frankly state, "Tian Dan already knew that I am Dong Horse Fanatic. He has captured a friend of mine and wanted to blackmail me. Luckily, I could tell that my friend has been killed already and I threatened to kill him for revenge. Thus, he wanted to kill me first."

Lu Buwei was silent for some time. He finally replied, "I wonder how did he find such a perfect opportunity to attack you. Just like that stupid Lu Xiong, he must have bore grudges and was dissatisfied with you. Luckily, I was the one who sent you back and had no time to instruct my men to assassinate you. Otherwise, I will be a key suspect too."

Xiang Shaolong was full of admiration at Lu Buwei's demeanour and persuasive skills. It is no surprise so many people are willing to work for him or work with him. For example, the words he mentioned earlier are full of intimacy and sincerity.

Xiang Shaolong divulged, "In Handan City, Tian Dan did hint to me that he is working with someone in Xianyang City and he is confident of dealing with me. He is obviously not referring to you but one of the six officials at the meeting yesterday."

Lu Buwei nodded, "Lu Gong, Xu Xian, Wang He and Meng Ao are above suspicion. The remaining are Cai Ze and Wang Wan. Cai Ze is more suspicious as I was the one who took over his Premier position. Hng! How dare he pretend to be loyal to me! Watch how I get rid of him!"

Xiang Shaolong was shocked, "I think you should investigate further!"

Lu Buwei coldly smiled, "I know what I am doing. Yes! Have you made up your mind about Niangrong?"

Xiang Shaolong recalled the saying 'A true man must be ruthless' and hardened his heart, "Premier Lu has such a high opinion of me. How can I not recognize it? This matter..."

He was interrupted by a shrill voice outside the window, "Hold it!"

Both men had a big fright when Lu Niangrong came in dressed in fiery red. She faced Lu Buwei first and informed, "Father must not blame the guards for failing in their duty. It was me who told them to keep quiet about my presence."

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly stood up and paid his respects.

Lu Buwei frowned, "Commander Xiang and I are having a secret discussion. How can Rong'er eavesdrop on us?"

Lu Niangrong stood proudly before them and declared, "As long as it concerns my future, I have the right to know. In Qin, do as the Qin people do. The Qin has a custom of girls choosing their husbands. As the daughter of the Right Premier of Qin, I should enjoy this right too. Am I mistaken?"

Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong glanced at each other, not knowing how to deal with this stubborn girl.

Lu Niangrong's gaze fell on Xiang Shaolong's face. Showing displeasure, she arrogantly proclaimed, "To marry me, you must first defeat me in all areas. After that, you will be qualified to be ONE of the men who are suitable for my hand in marriage."

Irritated, Lu Buwei hissed, "Rong'er!"

Lu Niangrong stomped her feet and whined, "Father! Do you really love me?"

Lu Buwei shrugged his shoulders to Xiang Shaolong, showing that he is powerless too and softly advised, "Xiang Shaolong is unparalleled in his character and swordsmanship. Of course Father loves you."

Xiang Shaolong is greatly amused. He had to agree to the marriage so that he can live past the hunting fair and Lu Buwei will not suspect him to be Mo Ao's killer. To his surprise, this third daughter of Lu Buwei is eavesdropping on them outside the window and create a disturbance, fulfilling his wish indirectly.

Lu Niangrong sauntered to the front of Xiang Shaolong and raised her attractive face, assessing him. She insisted, "I didn't say I do not like him! But there is someone who is better than him. Unless he can prove that he is better than this man, I will never choose him to be my husband."

She was facing Xiang Shaolong but her words are directed at her father. Her attitude is a revengeful one, as if she is insulting Xiang Shaolong in return for rejecting her hand in marriage earlier.

She may be very enticing but because Lu Buwei is his sworn enemy, Xiang Shaolong has no feelings for her. He smiled, "Who is this gentleman Third Mistress is attracted to?"

Lu Niangrong's lips curled up and shot him a look, challenging, "It is none of your business. Let's see how you fare at the hunting fair!"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled at Lu Buwei, "I am afraid Miss will be disappointed."

Lu Buwei frowned, "Rong'er, watch your words. Shaolong has just been ambushed and his leg was injured. Tomorrow..."

Lu Niangrong was annoyed, "He cannot even protect himself and how can he qualify to be my husband? Father! You must not speak about the marriage anymore. I will rather die than to marry him."

With a loud Humph, she left quickly.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly overjoyed but pretended to be dejected.

Lu Buwei sat down and sighed, "I have spoilt her. Shaolong need not worry about it. I will speak to her over the next few days."

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly replied, "As you decide!"

In his mind, he must somehow let Guan Zhongxie know about this so that Lu Niangrong will not 'change her mind'. If

he made love to Lu Niangrong, Lu Buwei will be unable to proceed with this marriage proposal anymore.

Lu Buwei thought for some time and softly asked, "Does Shaolong really want to kill Tian Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "Of course I do but it is very difficult. I am angry and not thinking clearly when I said that. After I left, I realised that I have been too reckless."

Lu Buwei nodded his head and began to think again. When he wanted to say something, an attendant reported that Li Yuan is here with an urgent matter.

Lu Buwei was taken by surprise and stood up, "Let me think about this further and we shall discuss more in the future. Let me first see what Li Yuan is up to."

Xiang Shaolong almost could not hide his happiness and stood up.

Li Yuan has been tricked.

Leaving the Premier Residence, he went straight to the palace and seek an audience with the Crown Prince. Xiao Pan received him in the hall of his bedroom.

The palace girls serving him were pretty and enchanting. A few of them are even younger than him.

After they got seated, Xiao Pan noticed him paying attention to the girls and smiled, "These are all top grade virgin beauties presented to me by each of the six states. If you are keen, I can give you some of them."

Xiang Shaolong remembered the day he stopped him from molesting Lady Ni's maid and was feeling emotional. He shook his head, "Crown Prince is mistaken. I am afraid that you may indulge in women and damage your health."

Xiao Pan replied with determination, "Commander can put your mind at ease."

He gestured and dismissed the palace girls and intimately revealed, "Since Mother was raped and died a tragic death, I have sworn to focus all my energy on vengeance and will not waste any of my precious time on women."

Xiang Shaolong thought that this must be one of the reasons why Xiao Pan can unite the world in the future. The other princes of the six states are all indulging in wine and women. Only with his Mother's death can Xiao Pan focus absolutely on his revenge and ignored all the beautiful women beside him.

He nodded, "Women can help to balance your physical and mental health as long as it is kept in control."

Xiao Pan added, "You are right. Grand Tutor Qin gave me the same advice too."

Pausing, he continued, "I heard from Lord Changwen that you have an arrow injury. When I tried to visit you, you were asleep already and I was worried sick. What actually happened?"

Xiang Shaolong told him the whole story and Xiao Pan had the same conclusion as Lu Buwei. He was agitated, "There

must be a spy as Tian Dan can never predict the two girls will bring you out of the City for a contest.”

Xiang Shaolong interjected, “Let Lu Buwei worry about this. Right! You ignored your Mother’s advice yesterday. Did she hold it against you?”

Xiao Pan coldly smiled, “After she got involved with Lao Ai, she was a little afraid of me. She did lecture me lightly and insisted that I promote Guan Zhongxie back to his post during the hunting fair. I agreed as I did not want to fall out with her over such insignificant matters.”

Speaking about Guan Zhongxie, Xiang Shaolong was reminded about Lu Dan’er and told Xiao Pan about their meetings.

Xiao Pan’s eyes were glowing with murderous intent and coldly hissed, “How dare Lu Buwei send someone to seduce my woman? In the future, I will make him die a horrible death.”

Xiang Shaolong can easily guess that he will force Lu Buwei to his death. He took the chance to ask, “Do you really like Lu Dan’er?”

Xiao Pan smiled, “She is a demanding girl and in terms of beauty, there are many girls around me who can win her. She is only Lu Gong’s granddaughter! Hng! I do not like someone to arrange my marriage for me. I should be the one who decides my marriage.”



Xiang Shaolong frowned, "I don't think the Empress will allow you to make your own decision."

Xiao Pan proudly state, "I have my own ways of dealing with this."

Xiang Shaolong wanted to find out more when Li Si came in carrying a large stack of official documents.

After he paid his respects, Li Si laid the documents on the table and reported, "As Crown Prince had instructed, I worked non-stop over the last two days and completed the documentation regarding the Outer Custodian. Please have a look."

Xiang Shaolong then remembered it was him who suggested this new post to promote Teng Sheng. He did not expect this post to involve so much documentation.

Xiao Pan looked at Li Si with appreciation and asked, "Is the Yan beauty a virgin?"

Li Si stole a look at Xiang Shaolong and replied embarrassedly, "For the past two days, I did not even have time to look at her."

Xiang Shaolong was confused when Xiao Pan cheerfully revealed, "Three days ago, Lu Buwei sent a Yan beauty to me and I transferred his gift to Subject Li. Subject Li was focused on his work and did not touch the girl at all. I appreciate this characteristic very much."

Li Si hurriedly knelt down and thanked Xiao Pan for his praises. Xiang Shaolong can tell that Li Si is very touched.

Xiang Shaolong finally understood that a good king will have good ministers serving him. If it was someone else, they would not notice Li Si's dedication and diligence.

After Li Si got seated, Xiao Pan rested his hand on the table and explained, "Empress and I had a deal. I made her lover an official and gave him a nice house to stay. She will have to give concessions on my marriage. I can accept the Chu Princess to be my concubine but my Queen will only be decided after my coronation."

Xiang Shaolong was full of praise. The chemistry between Qin Shihuang and Li Si is unbeatable. History has proven that this is an invincible partnership.

Li Si was concerned, "I heard that Official Xiang was injured by an arrow! I am glad to see that you are recovering well."

Xiao Pan interrupted, "Does Subject Xiang want to be examined by the Imperial Physician?"

Xiang Shaolong politely rejected and was about to say something when Lord Changping came in and reported that Lu Buwei is here to seek an audience with Li Yuan.

The three men knew what is about to happen next. Xiang Shaolong left with Lord Changping first while Li Si accompanied Xiao Pan to receive the guests.

Slipping out from the back door, they came to the Royal garden. Lord Changping pulled Xiang Shaolong to one side and apologised, "It is my sister's fault to bring you out of the city and caused you to be ambushed."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "It is not her fault. Some things are just unpredictable!"

Lord Changping scolded, "I wanted to bring you to a brothel when your men told me that you slept early due to your injury. I will be treating tonight and Official Guan said that you have agreed. Hng! If I find out who is behind this, I will kill him without hesitation."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Don't be so boastful. It must be some formidable evildoer who dares to attack me. Hei! How is your sister doing?"

Lord Changping sighed, "After she came back from outside the City, she threw a terrible tantrum and locked herself up in her room. She did not even have dinner. You should know that we brothers are busy with work and our parents have passed away. We simply do not have any time to humour her."

He uneasily asked, "What happened?"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "I admitted that I have lost and pleaded with them to stop pestering me. Your sister was infuriated and dragged Lu Dan'er away."

Lord Changping was delighted, "I can see that she is in love with you. Hei! Are you interested in her?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Since the tragic death of Princess Qian, I am devoid of emotions and focused my time on my duties. I am not interested in love or romance anymore."

Lord Changping sympathetically comforted, "I can understand your feelings. Three years ago, one of my concubines passed away due to illness. But men will always be men. Given enough time, you will get over it. As long as you do not hate her, it will be fine. But I understand Ying Ying's character. She is a revengeful person and will make things difficult for you. Ai! I do not know what to say."

Now, it is Xiang Shaolong's turn to comfort him.

Lord Changping sent Xiang Shaolong to the palace gates before they split up.

When Xiang Shaolong returned to the Command Centre, Teng Yi, Jing Jun had left with Lord Changwen to the western suburbs to prepare for the hunting fair tomorrow.

He was doing some administrative work when an attendant reported that the Zhou couple is here to see him.

Xiang Shaolong had assumed that they had left Xianyang City long ago. He only realised now that they are still in the Command Centre and hurriedly invited them in.

After they got seated, Xiang Shaolong asked curiously, "Why didn't you leave?"

Mister Zhou shyly explained, "I have spoken with my wife and we are interested to follow Master Xiang. For three generations, my family runs a ship building business. Is there any way I can be of use?"

Xiang Shaolong suspiciously assessed them and saw that they have a fine bearing and were unlike common folks. He

could not help but asked, "Why did both of you come to Xianyang City?"

Mister Zhou revealed; "Actually, we are from the royal family of Song. When our state was annihilated, we became wanderers. She..."

He looked at his wife and solemnly state, "She is not my wife but my sister. We pretended to be a couple to make our travelling easier. We came to Xianyang City to try our luck, hoping to be a permanent resident here, get a job and stay here for good."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback.

His sister lowered her head and explained, "My name is Zhou Wei and my brother here is Zhou Liang. We are willing to accept any positions you may have."

Xiang Shaolong scanned her delicate face and noticed that she is indeed very attractive despite her simple clothes and lack of make-up. Now he understood why Lu Bang is besotted with her. Feeling sorry for them, he nodded, "I will do my best and help both of you. Ai! Get up! You are making me feel bad!"

Both of them had kneeled on the floor and kowtowed with thanks.

Xiang Shaolong the 21st century man is most uncomfortable with this gesture and hurriedly helped them up.

After some discussion with them, an attendant reported that Prince Dan is here. Xiang Shaolong got someone to send

them both to the Wu Residence and instructed Tao Fang to help them to settle down. He then went to the main hall to see Prince Dan.

With Prince Dan are Physician Leng Ting, General Xu Yize and the flamboyant advisor You Zhi.

After the guards have all been dismissed, Xiang Shaolong smiled, "The Prince has received news about Li Yuan's departure?"

Prince Dan admiringly praised, "Commander Xiang is amazingly talented. Li Yuan is really returning back to Chu at once. What did you tell him?"

Xiang Shaolong evaded his question, "It is nothing much. Has Prince decided to cooperate with me?"

Prince Dan did not ask any further and put his hand out.

Xiang Shaolong stretched his own hand and they shared a tight handshake and broke out into laughter. Their eyes are staring at each other and no words are needed between them.

To Prince Dan, his biggest threat is not Qin but the ambitious and powerful Tian Dan.

After they released each other's hands, Prince Dan asked, "It is improper for me to participate personally but would it be sufficient if I hand Xu Yiluan and his army of five thousand cavalry army under your full control?"

You Zhi added, "I will assist you to ensure that they will follow your orders."

Xiang Shaolong was on cloud nine as he did not anticipate Prince Dan to be so easy-going and trusting of himself. Pleased, he replied, "If this is the case, Tian Dan's death is guaranteed."

They discussed further on the details of their attack before Prince Dan left with his men.

Xiang Shaolong was simply thrilled and suddenly longed for his wives, son and the Tian sisters. He left the Command Centre and head towards Qin Qing's residence.

## CHAPTER 10

## Eastern Province Rebellion

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHEN he arrived at Qin Qing's residence, she received him in the main hall, mentioning, "Sister Yanran and the rest have left the City to try their horses, preparing to show their true abilities during the hunting fair tomorrow. I am not feeling well so I did not accompany them."

Xiang Shaolong was concerned, "How are you feeling?"

She did look slightly tired.



Qin Qing lowered and shook her head lightly, "I am fine! I just did not sleep well last night!"

Raising her head, her clear and pretty eyes look straight ahead at him and explained, "I am slightly worried. When I came back from the palace yesterday evening, I ran into Lord Gaoling and said hi to him. He was very energetic and I am concerned that he might cause some trouble."

Lord Gaoling is the man who was substituted by King Zhuangxiang to be the new King of Qin. Xiang Shaolong was alarmed as he was too focused on Tian Dan and neglected this man. Lord Longyang did alert him that Lord Gaoling and Zhao's General Pang Nuan are in secret contact but he did not pay much attention to it as he did not have a high opinion of Pang Nuan. With Qin Qing's reminder, he could not help but feel worried about it.

Qin Qing dismissed, "I must have been over sensitive. With you protecting Crown Prince, I can set my mind at ease."

Xiang Shaolong thought that if the military is involved, he will be prepared but if it was some dark conspiracy, he may be taken by surprise! Oh! He should inform Lu Buwei about this and distract him and benefitting himself at the same time. Lu Buwei should be more concerned about Xiao Pan's safety than him.

Qin Qing saw that he was deep in thought and slowly sighed, "I was having a meal with Empress yesterday and that irritating Lao Ai is always by her side. Why is she so obsessed with such a disgusting man?"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "He is truly someone who looks good on the outside but has no substance all. Unfortunately, there are not many people like Grand Tutor Qin who can see that."

Qin Qing trembled slightly and her pretty eyes shone with surprise, "No wonder sister Yanran always say talking with you is the most refreshing and entertaining thing in the world and your conversations are never boring!"

Xiang Shaolong was aroused and had to ask, "Does Grand Tutor Qin feel the same?"

Qin Qing's face turned red and she shot him a look. Lowering her head, she nodded slightly. She looked absolutely enthralling.

Xiang Shaolong was bewitched by her charm but felt some regrets. He did not know what to say next and the room became quiet.

The short silence seemed to last forever.

Qin Qing asked in a low voice, "Has Commander Xiang eaten?"

Xiang Shaolong blurted out without thinking, "Yes!"

Qin Qing giggled and shot him an emotional look, declaring, "Finally I caught Commander Xiang lying. It is still late morning and lunch is not even prepared yet. If you do not want to have lunch with me, you can say that you are busy with work and I cannot expose you."

Xiang Shaolong was greatly embarrassed and stuttered incoherently. His face became as red as a fireball.

Qin Qing was not the least upset and stood up, adding, "I have no time for you. I need to send lunch outside the City to your wives. Commander Xiang must be too busy to come along! Make sure you take your lunch!"

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to understand her forceful character and softly replied, "I do have some work to do! Hei! Please forgive me."

Qin Qing smiled implicitly but meaningfully at him. Witnessing Xiang Shaolong fumbling, she regained her usual coolness and plainly invited, "Commander Xiang, please!" This is her way of dismissing her guests

Following the direction her hand pointed, Xiang Shaolong walked towards the main door. Qin Qing followed closely behind him.

Xiang Shaolong had an evil thought and purposely halted without warning. Qin Qing did not expect a respected man like him to try such a trick. Letting out a shrill cry, she bumped right into his back.

It was a moment to die for.

In this moment, Xiang Shaolong resumed his flirty behaviour and snaked his hand behind and embraced her slender waist. He intimately whispered into her ear, "Grand Tutor Qin! Be careful."

Qin Qing had not been hugged for a long time. Her body turned soft and her cheeks are burning hot. Trembling like a small bird, she tried to push him away.

Xiang Shaolong dare not go overboard and took this chance to release her, saying, "Please excuse my behaviour. You need not send me any further."

Leaving Qin Qing with a frustrated and annoyed look on her face, Xiang Shaolong left happily.

He has regained the romantic side of him.

Due to all the complicated relationships, he was tormented by Qin Qing, Ying Ying, Lu Dan'er and Lu Niangrong.

Now, he felt like he has vented some of his frustration.

Recollecting the feeling of embracing her, his heart leapt for joy.

This is probably called Uncontrollable Love.

He was filled with this uncontrollable love and desire.

When Xiang Shaolong arrived at the Premier residence, Tu Xian came to welcome him and revealed, "There is a rebellion in Pingyuan Province. When Premier Lu received the news, he hurriedly left to seek an audience with Empress and Crown Prince."

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed. Pingyuan Province is made up of land that were seized from Zhao. The rebellion must be started by Pang Nuan but why?

Lu Buwei's natural reaction is to send the Qin army to protect the new province he had fought for. Otherwise, if Shangdang Province and Sanchuan Province followed their example and rebelled, with the intervention of Zhao and Han armies, it will be disastrous. The strategic eastern provinces will be lost and Lu Buwei's earlier efforts would be annulled.

To counter such a situation, Lu Buwei will send every available soldier to Pingyuan Province to crush the rebels. When that happens, Xianyang City will only be left with the Palace Guards, the Imperial Cavalry and the Imperial Infantry.

Under normal conditions, these three armies are sufficient to protect Xianyang City. But during the hunting fair, Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan will be in the open wilderness of the western suburbs.

If Lord Gaoling has an army of over ten thousand soldiers and know about the Xianyang's army strength as well as Xiao Pan's location, he may succeed with a well-planned ambush.

The more he thought, the worse he felt. It is inconvenient to speak with Tu Xian now so he bade farewell and left.

Tu Xian sent him out and reminded him about their appointment. Xiang Shaolong hurriedly left for the palace.

When he was about to reach the palace, a group of riders came into view. Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er are among the riders and between them was Guan Zhongxie.

Xiang Shaolong did not harbour any thoughts about the two girls but still felt sour about it.

Both girls have their own beautiful ways but Ying Ying's long legs, slender waist and full bosom is something very attractive to him.

When the girls saw Xiang Shaolong, they pretended to be friendly towards Guan Zhongxie and were chatting and laughing happily. They acted as if they did not see Xiang Shaolong.

Guan Zhongxie naturally cannot adopt the same attitude. He led several of his leaders and rode towards him, paying their respects.

Xiang Shaolong returned the greetings. Guan Zhongxie held his horse steady and informed, "There is some trouble in Pingyuan Province. The Crown Prince, Empress and Premier Lu are having an emergency meeting."

The two girls followed Guan Zhongxie in stopping their horses but put on an air of discontent and stared at Xiang Shaolong with hostility.

Xiang Shaolong was amused and greeted them. He proceeded to ask, "Where is Official Guan heading?"

Guan Zhongxie replied, "These two ladies wanted to check out the hunting grounds in the western suburbs. I will accompany them and report this matter to Lord Changwen and the rest. The weather is pretty good to take a ride outside the city."

Xiang Shaolong laughed loudly, "With pretty companions, anything will sound good."

He did not wait for the girls to react and rode away.

Ai! If not for Lu Buwei, Guan Zhongxie is a worthy friend and he would be truly happy for him. But now, he felt inferior as he had lost to Guan Zhongxie while he cannot do anything about it.

When he entered the palace, the meeting is still ongoing in the Qin Court.

Lord Changping pulled Xiang Shaolong to a corner and asked, "Did you manage to see Ying Ying?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head.

Lord Changping asked again, "Is she with Official Guan?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head again and commented, "I heard they are going to the western suburbs to check out the hunting grounds."

Lord Changping sighed, "This morning, I was summoned by Left Premier Xu Xian for a scolding. He instructed me to discipline my sister and not let her get close to Lu Buwei's men. I am in a dilemma. Does Official Xiang have any suggestions?"

Xiang Shaolong naturally understood his intention and bitterly smiled, "You should know that Guan Zhongxie is very good with women. With his excellent credentials, body, swordsmanship and looks, even I may not be his match.

Moreover, I am now her biggest enemy. You better resign to fate.”

Lord Changping was flustered, “How can I resign to fate? Xu Xian is exceedingly farsighted and he is never wrong. If Ying Ying marries Guan Zhongxie, what will happen if one day, his entire household is to be annihilated? Lu Buwei may be powerful now but he is still ranked lower than Lord Shang Yang in the past. Eventually, Lord Shang Yang’s body was torn apart by horses. Outsiders will not have a good ending in Qin. The higher their official post, the more terrible their deaths.”

Xiang Shaolong had not analyzed this problem from this angle and was left speechless.

Among the two brothers, Lord Changping is more sharp and knowledgeable. Lord Changwen is less clever and loves to have fun.

Lord Changping sighed, “You should understand my worries. Guan Zhongxie is considered our friend. How can I warn him to stay away from Ying Ying without a good reason?”

Xiang Shaolong was humoured. Lord Changping is right. How can he tell Guan Zhongxie that he will die with Lu Buwei in the future so please leave his sister alone?

Lord Changping was incensed, “You can still laugh about it. I am really at my wits end.”



Xiang Shaolong apologised, "I was entertained by your words! Her marriage has to be approved by you two elder brothers. Guan Zhongxie should not be that daring."

Lord Changping was annoyed, "It would be good if it was that simple. But if Lu Buwei proposed marriage on his behalf and even got the Empress involved, what can we say?"

Xiang Shaolong thought that sounded reasonable and helplessly advised, "At the end of the day, all you wanted was for me to woo your sister! Why don't you try to send a warning to Guan Zhongxie? Lu Gong warned him already."

Lord Changping bitterly laughed, "Lu Gong is very senior and does whatever he wants. Forty years later, we can be like him but definitely not now. Hei! Are you that uninterested in my sister? In Xianyang City, she is the next prettiest after widow Qin Qing. Of course there is still the Talented Lady Ji whom we have not met."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "You know your women well."

Lord Changping reached out and grabbed his arm, begging, "Stop hesitating. How about it?"

Looking at his arm, he added, "Shaolong, you are very muscular."

Xiang Shaolong adored this friend and without a choice, he promised, "Let me have a go! But I do not guarantee that I will be successful!"

Lord Changping was overjoyed. The meeting happened to end at the same time and Lu Buwei stepped out with Meng

Ao with serious expressions on their faces. They were still talking as they were walking.

Lu Buwei noticed Xiang Shaolong and waved him over.

When Xiang Shaolong begin to walk over, Meng Ao had left Lu Buwei already. Lu Buwei received him and they walked to the rear garden together. Lu Buwei explained in a low voice, "Shaolong should know what has happened. After our discussion, Meng Ao has been selected to lead an army to Pingyuan Province to crush the rebellion. Wang He will lead another army and be stationed at the eastern Passes. This will serve as a warning to Shangdang and Sanchuan Province not to make any foolish moves. In case they rebelled too, he will move in and crush them."

Pausing, he added; "What a coincidence. In a short space of time, all the excess soldiers in Xianyang City have all been used up and now it is our hunting fair. What does Shaolong think?"

Xiang Shaolong plainly state, "Lord Gaoling is planning a rebellion!"

Lu Buwei was startled, "What?"

Xiang Shaolong repeated his statement.

Lu Buwei composed himself and thought it over. They arrived at a small bridge and he sat down on one of the stone railings and hinted Xiang Shaolong to sit on the opposite side. He frowned, "How did Lord Gaoling motivate the Pingyuan residents to rebel?"

Xiang Shaolong sat on the opposite railing and looked down at the running water.

Noticing some swimming fishes, he calmly replied, "Lord Gaoling did not have this ability but he can conspire with Zhao General Pang Nuan to achieve this."

Lu Buwei slapped his thigh, "No wonder he left in such a hurry after the funeral. It is all because of this."

His eyes shining with a killing aura, he slowly state, "Lord Gaoling! You must be tired of living."

Turning to Xiang Shaolong, he instructed, "If he wants to rebel, the hunting fair is a golden opportunity. I shall put you in charge of this. If I am not wrong, Lord Gaoling's men will try to hide in the vicinity of Xianyang City today and tomorrow. With all the chaotic preparations, they can move undetected. We must also guard against Lord Gaoling's family warriors within the city. I will get Zhongxie to take care of this."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly pleased. Indirectly, Lord Gaoling has helped him to distract Lu Buwei from assassinating himself. Moreover, he had agreed to Lu Nianrong's hand in marriage.

Lu Buwei stood up, declaring, "I must see the Crown Prince and Empress. Shaolong must report everything to me so that I have a clear picture of what is going on."

Xiang Shaolong put on a respectful look until he left. He then rode his horse out of the city and towards the western suburbs.

## CHAPTER 11

## Exposing The Scheme

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHEN Xiang Shaolong and the Eighteen Guardians arrived at the West Gate, they ran into Ji Yanran and the rest who are about to return to the city.

The carriages stopped along the wide road leading to the West Gate. Xiang Shaolong leapt down his horse and went to say hi to the ladies.

Everybody have red and healthy looking faces, showing that they had a generous amount of exercise.

Xiang Bao'er saw Xiang Shaolong and waved his little hand calling him Father.

Zhao Zhi was annoyed, "Are you so busy that you cannot visit us?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed along, "After the hunting fair, I will spend more time with all of you!"

Wu Tingfang proudly state, "Ignore him Sister Zhi. We will have a good time with Sister Qing."

Xiang Shaolong reached out through the window and pinched the cute face of his son. He spoke briefly with the Tian sisters before he went to the second carriage.

When the blind was lifted, it revealed Ji Yanran and Qin Qing seated inside. Qin Qing's face was slightly red and was staring viciously at him.

Xiang Shaolong's heart begin to thump harder.

Ji Yanran smiled sweetly and gently asked, "Hubby is going to the western suburbs?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded and take this opportunity to inform Qin Qing, "The residents of Pingyuan Province are rebelling. This rebellion is likely to be linked to Lord Gaoling. Lu Buwei has been notified and I am fully in charge of this matter. Grand Tutor Qin can set your mind at ease."

Qin Qing could not stand his strong gaze and lowered her face. It was a magical and romantic moment.

Ji Yanran trembled slightly and asked in a low voice, "Lu Buwei has been especially kind to you!"

Xiang Shaolong remembered the marriage proposal and nodded.

Ji Yanran intimately whispered into his ear, "He really wants to kill you! That is why he is doing all these things to make people less suspicious of him. If you don't believe me, you can try asking Empress and Crown Prince. You will discover that Lu Buwei has given them a misleading impression of the hostility between you and him. Ai! Hubby is too trusting."

Xiang Shaolong was shocked but still have some doubts about it. He frantically nodded his head.

Ji Yanran slapped his shoulder and cooed, "Think about it! With Lu Buwei's intelligence, how can he not spy on Lord Gaoling and need you to remind him? If Lord Gaoling is rebelling, he will be the happiest man in Qin!"

Qin Qing heard these words and her face is filled with care and concern.

Xiang Shaolong's body trembled and was finally enlightened. He bowed, "Thanks for wife's reminder. Xiang Shaolong learnt something today."

Ji Yanran looked at Qin Qing who was staring at Xiang Shaolong. Noticing Ji Yanran penetrating gaze at her, she guiltily lowered her head.

Ji Yanran shot Xiang Shaolong another look and intimately advised, "Be careful!"

When the carriages are far away. Xiang Shaolong consolidated his thoughts and rode towards the western suburbs; however, his mood is very different from before.

Riding Jifeng and escorted by the Eighteen Guardians, he sped all the way.

The carriages transporting goods and other items to the hunting grounds formed a long queue and the atmosphere is very lively.

Beside the official road are ancient forests with giant pine trees that are a few hundred years old.

After leaving the city for three miles, the flat roads start to fluctuate up and down depending on the terrain. Every time they rode up a hill, they can see River Jing flowing in the south east direction. Below them, logs are flowing down the river towards the camping grounds. The logs will be used to build the campsite and inspection square.

Spring is now slowly being taken over by Summer and the strong wind is blowing through the grasslands and forests alike, making Xiang Shaolong feel extremely comfortable. Listening to the peaceful rustling sounds of the leaves, his thinking becomes very clear.

The Jing river is a few thousand miles long and it is intersected by many small rivers.

The thick forests and wide grasslands is home to many unique birds and beasts.



They rode through a deep valley with clouds on both sides of the slopes and the roads begin to widen. River Jing continued to flow in front of them and the thick pine trees are like poles pointing to heaven. Across the fresh green grasslands, there were countless tents that were pitched in an orderly manner. Thousands of Palace Guards and Cavalry Soldiers are busy with preparations and they have built two wooden bridges that go across River Jing.

Xiang Shaolong stopped on a hill and looked around him.

The grass straightened and bend down according to the wind and there are clusters of trees here and there. Herds of deer, horses, sheep and other wild animals are gathered around the river shore, drinking to their heart's content, occasionally letting out a small cry. Tomorrow, they will be the targets of the hunters.

The sun began to shift to the west where high mountains are stacked upon one another. That is where the most ferocious wild beasts roam.

Xiang Shaolong believed that with all the thick forests surrounding the camping grounds, it is a piece of cake to hide an entire army.

With his trained eye, he quietly scanned the surroundings and quickly grasped the geographical advantages and disadvantages. He then rode towards the main camp near the river.

The air is filled with sounds of horses braying and dogs barking.

An enormous flag embroidered with the word 'Qin' is flying grandly, competing with the beautiful clouds for everyone's attention.

As he rode past them, the workers will stop and greet him.

Leading the Guardians, he rode past several tents belonging to the various high ranking officials and generals before he came to the centralised main tent.

Lord Changwen is instructing his men to construct wooden gates in all four sides of the slope, providing additional protection to the main tent.

There are ten odd tents on this flat hilltop. Except for Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji, the rest of the tents belonged to the other members of the Royal Family.

Xiang Shaolong jumped down his horse and questioned, "Why are you building the gates now? Isn't it too hasty?"

Lord Changwen replied, "It is Premier Lu's idea. He received news about the Pingyuan Province rebellion and insisted that I build the gates by tomorrow morning."

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that it was a narrow escape. Ji Yanran is right. Lu Buwei knew about Lord Gaoling's rebellion a long time ago and acted ignorant to deceive him, causing him to let down his guard and even mistook Lu Buwei for really forgiving him.

Lord Changwen pointed to a group of men beside the river and commented, "Both assistant generals are there playing with the hunting dogs. My stubborn sister is there as well.

She is the one dressed in a white and green warrior suit; the one dressed in yellow and purple is Lu Dan'er."

He added in a low voice, "Has Big Brother spoken to you?"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head slightly, "Is there no one your sister likes among all the young men in Xianyang City? For example, An Gu is even a better catch than myself."

Lord Changwen sighed, "An Gu is a talented man who is comparable to Shaolong. However, they grew up together and treat each other like siblings so it is impossible for them to fall in love."

Pausing, he added, "Qin is unlike the six states and it is very common for people to have pre-marital sex. Ying Ying has dated several guys before but none of them lasted long enough. She became serious only after she met you."

Xiang Shaolong countered, "She is only serious about Guan Zhongxie. The two of you are forcing me to join this disadvantageous competition."

Lord Changwen laughed along, "It is because we admired you! Hei! We dote on our sister dearly. Actually Zhongxie is not bad and he is a good fighter. Unfortunately, he is Lu Buwei's man."

Cheers can be heard from the crowd. Guan Zhongxie had put on his armour and was playing with one of the hunting dogs.

Xiang Shaolong climbed onto Jifeng and remarked, "Here I go!"

Lord Changwen hurriedly asked for a horse and rode with him towards the crowd.

Escorted by a large body of men, both men came to the edge of the crowd and dismounted.

Teng Yi was focused on observing Guan Zhongxie's intricate footsteps. When he saw Xiang Shaolong, he had a serious expression on his face. After he waved to Lord Changwen, he hinted at Xiang Shaolong to accompany him to one side. Arriving at a cluster of rocks near the river, he reported, "This man is extraordinarily shrewd. Even under such circumstances, he is still hiding his true abilities. What a frightening character!"

Xiang Shaolong glanced back at them and nodded in agreement, "He is the most dangerous swordsman we have ever come across. This man had reached a very high level of swordsmanship and I have never seen anymore who can breathe so calmly. I admit that I have not reached his level of cultivation."

Teng Yi smiled, "But you are someone who never underestimate your enemy. If it was Jing Jun, he would never believe that someone can be better than him."

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Right! Where is that kid?"

Teng Yi replied, "He is out surveying. The more we know about the hunting grounds, the better chance we have at killing Mo Ao. How is your leg injury?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Much better but I still cannot run or the wound will reopen for sure."

Teng Yi advised, "When I changed your dressing this morning, the swelling has subsided. Based on your physique, you should recover fully after two days."

Xiang Shaolong happily state, "Now, I must thank Tian Dan for injuring me. It will be harder for Lu Buwei to kill me now."

Teng Yi was stunned, "Didn't Third Brother say Lu Buwei is patching up with you?"

Xiang Shaolong heaved a sigh and repeated Ji Yanran's words. He also told him about the Pingyuan Province rebellion and Lord Gaoling's scheme.

Teng Yi thought carefully and affirmed, "I will handle Lord Gaoling. If necessary, we will use our elite army. We must not let Guan Zhongxie gain this honour."

As he spoke, they noticed Guan Zhongxie, Lord Changwen, Lu Dan'er and Ying Ying walking towards them. Teng Yi winked at him and whispered, "I will go and join Little Jun!" and slipped away.

From afar, Lord Changwen winked and shouted, "Official Xiang, let's test the target boards at the archery grounds. Official Guan has an iron bow that only he is able to pull apart."

Xiang Shaolong was agonized. Lord Changwen is trying to create an opportunity for him to put down Guan Zhongxie in

front of the two girls. Xiang Shaolong knew himself too well. He may be considered an expert archer but he is still inferior to Wang Jian, Teng Yi and even the dead Lian Jin. As long as Guan Zhongxie is a better archer than Lian Jin, he will be humiliated.

Guan Zhongxie raised his hands to show his innocence, "I am not harbouring any intention of winning. It is Lord Changwen and the two Misses who wanted Brother Xiang to show us your skills!"

Xiang Shaolong cursed secretly and acted apologetic, "I am afraid I have to disappoint Official Guan. My leg injury has yet to fully recover and it is not advisable for me to exert any strength. I think we can just watch Official Guan perform."

Guan Zhongxie was startled, "Forgive my impertinence. I noticed that Official is walking normally and thought that you have recovered!"

Ying Ying's face turned cold, "Is Official Xiang making excuses?"

Lu Dan'er spat, "Coward!" Dragging Ying Ying, she unhappily turned around and shouted to Guan Zhongxie, "Official Guan! Let's find something else to do!"

Guan Zhongxie humbly paid his respects and left with the two girls.

They left Xiang Shaolong and Lord Changwen smiling bitterly at each other.

Xiang Shaolong thought of Tu Xian's appointment and bade farewell, returning back to Xianyang City.

On the way back, he thought of the girls' cynical expressions but did not feel bad at all. He was amazed at his own change.

In his wild days in the 21st Century, he must win every fight and every drinking contest.

He has lost his eagerness to be the victor in everything. Now he looks at the bigger picture and does not mind these insignificant losses. That is why he is not bothered about the girls' vicious attitude.

Maybe he has finally matured!

Back at Xianyang City, there was still some time so he returned to Wu residence first. He checked with Tao Fang about the Zhou siblings and went to visit them.

Tao Fang has given them a nice accommodation in the east garden near where the Guardians are sleeping. It is quite a comfortable place to stay.

When Xiang Shaolong stepped into the small hall, the pretty Zhou Wei is busy sewing in one corner while Zhou Liang was fiddling with a small metal mechanism on the table. When they saw him coming in, they hurriedly got up to greet him.

It may be due to sympathy that Xiang Shaolong is especially caring towards them. He smiled at Zhou Wei, "Is Miss Zhou making new clothes?"

Zhou Wei's face reddened and she lowered her head, replying, "En!"

Xiang Shaolong was feeling strange at her shyness and sat down on the other side of the table. Gesturing for them to sit down too, he asked Zhou Liang, "What is that toy you are playing with?"

Zhou Liang handed him the metal piece and replied, ""This is a wrist guard for a hunting eagle to perch on. Watch!

He lifted his sleeve and showed Xiang Shaolong his left wrist. There were over ten scars on his wrist.

Xiang Shaolong was interested and asked, "So Brother Zhou is an expert in shipbuilding and eagle-rearing. Since there is a wrist guard, why are you still injured by the eagle claws?"

Zhou Liang answered, "The wrist guard is meant for new eagles. An expert can train the eagle to vary its clawing strength. These scars are accumulated before I was fifteen. Since then, I have no accidents with them anymore."

Xiang Shaolong reasoned, "In this case, Brother Zhou must be an expert eagle handler."

Zhou Liang humbly replied, "That was in the past. Now, I felt guilty towards them. Under their fierce stares, I dare not rear them anymore."

Xiang Shaolong thought for a while and instructed, "From today onwards, Brother Zhou need not worry about his next meal or being bullied. Just focus on developing this and it may help me in the future."



Zhou Liang was delighted and his eyes were shining, "I dare not disobey Master Xiang's orders. Hei! You can call me Little Liang. I dare not be addressed as Brother Zhou!"

Xiang Shaolong officially state, "I have never regarded Brother Zhou as an outsider. You should not call me Master Xiang too. Can I ask you what is the secret of rearing eagles? How long does it take to train one and what are they capable of?"

Zhou Liang brightened up and proudly revealed, "First, you must know which eagles are trainable. The easiest to train are King Eagles who share human instincts. After that, you need plenty of patience and hard work. The eagle must be reared from young and need about a year to be fully trained. Hei! Hunting is nothing to them. The pinnacle of rearing eagles is to train Warrior Eagles. They can chase the enemy from the sky, spy on surroundings and assassinate someone. They can be a formidable weapon."

It is now Xiang Shaolong's turn to brighten up. He excitedly instructed, "We must not delay any further. Brother Zhou shall look for your King Eagle tomorrow. I will send some men to accompany you and make it easier for you."

Zhou Liang received his order gratefully.

Xiang Shaolong noticed that it is about time to go and he bade farewell. Stepping out of the door, Zhou Wei's voice rang out, "Official Xiang!"

Xiang Shaolong turned around and smiled, "What can I do for Miss Zhou?"

Zhou Wei came to him and shyly asked, "Big Brother has an assignment on hand. What about me?"

Xiang Shaolong gently replied, "Your brother will rear eagles and you will sew clothes. Isn't that what both of you are doing?"

Zhou Wei's face turned even redder and slowly state, "I wish to wait upon Master. Will you please give your consent?"

From her expression, he knew that it is not as simple as it looks. She is willing to sleep with him for the rest of his life. He cannot blame her as he probably is her dream man. Moreover, it is a way of repaying her gratitude to him.

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "That is too tough for you. Let me think about it and decide tomorrow."

Zhou Wei shook her head with determination, "Unless Master Xiang despises me and finds me clumsy, I have decided to wait on you for the rest of my life."

Frankly, Xiang Shaolong is also tempted by this pretty woman in front of him. Agonized, he thought that he will just agree for the time being and decide later.

He sighed, "You are making things difficult for me. For the time being, we shall follow your wishes! But..."

Before he can finish speaking, Zhou Wei joyfully interrupted, "Thanks for your approval!"

With a contented look, she turned back into the house.

Xiang Shaolong can only leave the house with a bitter smile on his face.

## CHAPTER 12

## Flying Dragon Spear

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

AT the appointed hut, Tu Xian is already waiting for him. When they saw each other, both men are equally delighted. Through these difficult times, they have built a trusting relationship and a strong friendship. If not for Tu Xian's intervention, he would have been killed a long time ago.

Tu Xian smiled, "You did a great job with Lu Xiong, catching Lu Buwei unaware and losing face in front of everyone. Back at the residence, this traitor threw a mad tantrum and

summoned Mo Ao for a two hour meeting. Needless to say, they are plotting on killing you.”

Xiang Shaolong inquired, “What happened to Lu Xiong and his son?”

Tu Xian revealed, “Lu Xiong may not be badly beaten like his son but was publicly slapped and scolded by Lu Buwei in front of everyone. Lu Buwei has sent him to help out with the Canal and harass the villagers opposing it. No one is happier than Guan Zhongxie. Lu Xiong has been on loggerheads with him and with his exit, Guan Zhongxie’s importance is elevated within the Premier Residence. With a few more accomplishments, Lu Niangrong will also be his.”

Xiang Shaolong had a brainwave, “Guan Zhongxie is someone greedy for fame and power. Does Brother Tu think we can win him to our side?”

Tu Xian seriously state, “You must never do that. This man’s shrewdness and ambitions are not inferior compared to Lu Buwei. Moreover, he is clear that he is an outsider and is only using Lu Buwei to pursue his own goals. In addition, he bore deep grudges against you over Lian Jin’s death. You must not waste any effort in this area.”

Xiang Shaolong nodded in agreement. Tu Xian is an experienced man and his judgement will not be wrong.

Tu Xian divulged, “Recently, I have been secretly monitoring Mo Ao’s activities. I discovered that he had got somebody to produce some floats as well as some snorkelling masks. I am positive that these will be used against you.”

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed as this is something he did not consider at all. Rivers and lakes are part of the hunting grounds. Except for the two bridges across the Jing River, they will require rafts or even wade through the water. If someone attacks them underwater, such as shooting a poisonous needle, the victim will be caught with his pants down. He took a deep breath and sighed, "I am lucky that my leg is injured and I cannot go anywhere."

Tu Xian smiled weakly, "That's the best plan so far. But you must still be careful. He will try to kill Brother Teng and Little Jun too. If they are killed, your strength will be drastically affected."

Pausing, he added, "I may not know what they are doing exactly but based on Mo Ao's intelligence, he will create a situation where they can attack you when you least expect it."

Xiang Shaolong's is perspiring with cold sweat. He did not anticipate Lu Buwei to target Teng Yi and Jing Jun too. With Tu Xian's reminder, he realised how careless he is.

Tu Xian described in a deep voice, "The most frightening thing about Mo Ao is that he is the silent killer in the background. He knows how to protect himself and cannot be bothered with fame and official posts. He is a man who goes for the big kill."

Xiang Shaolong questioned, "Doesn't he have any flaws?"

Tu Xian answered, "His only flaw is that he lusts after women! When he first saw Widow Qin Qing, he lost his

bearings. Lu Buwei cannot do anything about her or she would have long entered his bedroom. I forgot to tell you. Lu Buwei is very jealous about Talented Lady Ji marrying you. On more than one occasion, he had mentioned that she is too good for you.”

He added, “Comparing both of them, Guan Zhongxie has better self control. He has never touched any of Lu Buwei’s courtesans or maids. He spends most of his time practising his horse riding, archery, swordplay and even reads military classics. He repeats this schedule every day and his willpower is amazing. Moreover, no one knows what he wants or what he is thinking about. He will be a more difficult opponent to kill compared to Mo Ao. If an opportunity presents itself, you must kill him too so that we can all sleep better at night.” Xiang Shaolong was totally frightened by these words. Compared to himself, he is much more lecherous and lazy.

Emotionless people like Guan Zhongxie are the most frightening opponents.

Mo Ao has a weakness, which is Qin Qing.

This weakness will cost him his life.

Tu Xian sighed again, “Lu Buwei’s influence is growing drastically. Every day, there are countless official coming to flatter him or present gifts. Additionally, he controlled Empress through Lao Ai. If this continues, Qin will soon belong to him. If not for his strict security, I will present him with a cup of poison wine just like how he poisoned others.”

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Lao Ai may not be as beneficial to him as it looks."

He told Tu Xian about supporting Lao Ai to oppose Lu Buwei.

Tu Xian was stunned and sighed after some time, "Shaolong may be better than Mo Ao in terms of scheming! Lao Ai is indeed a selfish and ungrateful man."

Xiang Shaolong was feeling guilty about this praise and asked about Lu Nianrong.

Tu Xian responded, "She is the only person I do not detest within the Premier Residence. Lu Buwei's three sons are useless bums who indulges in wine and women. The other two daughters are ugly, incompetent and not worth his attention. Only Lu Nianrong manages to win his affection. Whoever marries her will be considered to be Lu Buwei's successor. If you can make her fall in love with you, Lu Buwei will be in trouble."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "Even if she is my arch enemy's daughter, I should not toy with her feelings. Moreover, I am not as capable as Guan Zhongxue. Even I can feel that he is a very charming man."

Tu Xian disclosed, "Guan Zhongxue has his own way of getting anything or anyone he desires. Additionally, he is humble, polite and never put on any airs and is not as inaccessible as Mo Ao. He knows how to win your respect and he has bribed everyone around Lu Nianrong. Needless to say, Lu Nianrong is deeply infatuated with him. You honestly do not have the slightest chance of marrying her."



He thought hard and frowned, "But things are not as simple as it looks. Since you rejected the marriage, she was annoyed but her interest in you grew. She loves people with extraordinary sword skills. If you can beat Guan Zhongxie, she may be moved."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "That is even more difficult than winning her affections openly. Do you know if they had made love already?"

Tu Xian affirmed, "Guan Zhongxie will never do such silly things that will anger Lu Buwei."

Glancing out of the window at the darkening skies, he added, "In the three days of the hunting fair, Shaolong must be fully alert and protect yourself. Do not give Lu Buwei any chance to assassinate you. You are his biggest obstacle and you must not be complacent when dealing with him."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in agreement and they parted.

As Xiang Shaolong strode down the road, the street lamps are being lighted up. Xianyang City's nightlife is not as lively as Handan City or Daliang City but there are still people walking on the roads. This is even more true on the main roads where the brothels are located. In fact, there are more people on those roads at night than in the daytime.

They have decided to meet at Xianyang City's biggest brothel Drunken Wind Brothel. Drunken Wind Brothel is a privately owned high class brothel and Xiang Shaolong do not know

who the owner is but he is sure that he is a very popular man.

Xiang Shaolong used to frequent pubs and nightclubs in the past. In this ancient period, this is the first time he is visiting a private brothel and he could not help but feel refreshing.

Wearing a normal warrior suit and walking down a busy ancient street, he reminisce about his life and was intoxicated.

Four years has come and gone.

Xiao Pan the future Qin Shihuang has transformed from a playful and innocent child into a determined and capable Crown Prince.

Nobody among the six states could be bothered with him but are more concerned about Lu Buwei or himself. Ten years later, they will realise how wrong they are.

While he was deep in his thoughts, he came to Drunken Wind Brothel's vicinity and noticed it was crowded with horse carriages and people.

The bouncer recognized him immediately and bowed deeply, welcoming him.

Before he could move another step, a familiar voice called him from behind, "Official Xiang, please hold your step!"

Xiang Shaolong recognized that it was Han Chuang's voice and turned around with astonishment. He saw Han Chuang dismounting from his carriage and striding towards him in

large steps. When he reached him, he held his sleeve and pulled him towards the entrance, whispering, "Dong Horse Fanatic, you have deceived me thoroughly."

Xiang Shaolong could not be bothered to deny, thinking that the whole world should know about his impersonation by now. He bitterly laughed, "Who told you?"

Han Chuang was about to say something when a well-dressed middle-aged man accompanied by two attractive ladies with thick make-up welcomed, "Welcome to your first visit Official Xiang and welcome back Marquis Han. I, Wu Fu, am deeply honoured by your presence."

On his right, the beauty giggled, "I am Guiyan. When our girls heard that Official Xiang is coming, everyone is putting on their best make up, hoping to be chosen by you!"

Han Chuang chided, "So no one is bothered about me?"

The other beauty seemed to be familiar with Han Chuang. Batting her long eye lashes at him, she smiled, "Marquis Han is so jealous; shall I accompany you myself?"

She then faced Xiang Shaolong and informed, "I am Bailei, please make yourself at home."

Han Chuang is an experienced brothel man and will not take it easy on them. He clapped Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and exclaimed, "Bailei actually wants you to make yourself easy in her home!"

The two girls incidentally burst out in giggles.

Wu Fu was still laughing as he led them through the main hall and into an inner chamber. A pretty maid served tea and the two girls sat beside both of them.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling puzzled over why they are seated there when Wu Fu clapped once and smiled, "This is Official Xiang's first visit and we have prepared a little surprise for you. It is a just little gift and we hope you do not take it to heart."

Xiang Shaolong was highly amused. Corruption and bribery is the same in these ancient times. As the Imperial Cavalry Commander, he is as good as Xianyang City's chief protector. These brothel owners must naturally treat him well so as to enjoy certain benefits in the future.

Han Chuang smiled, "Boss Wu is knowledgeable man. Official Xiang will surely appreciate your friendship."

Half of Bailei's body is already leaning on Han Chuang's back and she teased, "Marquis Han is the knowledgeable man. Our boss pale in comparison!"

On the other side, Guiyan leaned into Xiang Shaolong's bosom and cooed, "Official Xiang must come here more often or the girls and myself will not let you off."

Xiang Shaolong finally realised the meaning of 'A brothel is a hero's home.'

For the past two years, he has been avoiding all females except his own wives and maids. On one hand, he is satisfied

with them already. The real reason is he wants to avoid the responsibility linked to relationships.

The plus point of these women is the way sex is conducted. Everybody can fulfil their fantasies and simply leave without any repercussions. This is also a way to balance the human needs as long as it is not done excessively.

When Xiang Shaolong first arrived in Handan City, someone brought him to the Official Brothel and he was faced with Su Nu's tragic ending. This tragedy has left a scar in his mind, making him fearful of brothels and even more fearful of the tragic stories of the brothel girls.

But he can tell that private brothels and official brothels was very different. Private brothels girls are women who are willing to enter flesh trade and are very open about their occupations.

Remembering the days when he was down and out, he was lucky to be retained by Tao Fang. Otherwise, he may have to be a paid assassin or a gigolo.

Guiyan intimately whispered into his ear, "Why is Official Xiang so listless? Let me get Meimei to accompany you! Every guy who sees her will be mesmerized."

Xiang Shaolong thought that this name sounded familiar. His mind raced furiously and he recalled that it is Lao Ai's old flame Dan Meimei who bewitched Wu Tingwei into betraying his family and eventually dying a tragic death. He was annoyed and barked, "This beautiful Guiyan

accompanying me is good enough; who cares about the ugly Meimei?"

Bailei sniggered, "Official Xiang is a lecherous man too. You are even better than Marquis Han is making girls happy!"

Han Chuang laughed, "Official Xiang's real abilities will scare both of you to death if you ever come to know about it! He is not only good at humouring girls."

His remarks were followed by a flurry of laughing and teasing.

Wu Fu was curious, "So Marquis Han and Official Xiang know each other very well."

Xiang Shaolong and Han Chuang smiled knowingly at each other.

At this moment, four pretty maids entered the room in two groups. The first two were holding a spear that was three metres long and the other two were holding onto a triangular shield that was one and a half metres tall.

Xiang Shaolong was blown away.

He anticipated a gift of some precious jewels or gems but he was presented with weapons instead.

Wu Fu stood up and held the spear in his right hand and the shield in his left hand. He grunted and pretended to attack an invisible enemy and was incredibly entertaining and imposing.

Guiyan intimately whispered into Xiang Shaolong's ear, "This is our Drunken Wind Brothel sacred treasure that we use to ward off evil spirits. Three years ago, a guest presented this gift to us. When Boss Wu heard that Official Xiang is coming, he thought for a long time before he decided to give this to you."

Xiang Shaolong believed that this guest must have run out of money so he had to leave his weapons behind. In these times, top grade weapons can be used as currency but they are not easily available.

Han Chuang received the spear and shield from Wu Fu and tested its weight. He was agitated, "These two weapons can fetch at least a hundred taels of gold. I cannot believe that Boss Wu have such a precious pair of weapons."

Xiang Shaolong secretly praised Wu Fu. With his gift of weapons, it is hard for him to reject and it is also hard to trace as a bribe. He stood up joyfully and received the spear. The body of the spear was straight, shimmering and engraved with motifs. The spear head is extremely sharp and made of top quality steel. This is the first time he has seen such a well-made spear.

Wu Fu leaned over and pointed to the spear, "Official Xiang, please look here. This spear has a name."

Xiang Shaolong then noticed there were two ancient words engraved near the spear head. He naturally could not read them.

Fortunately, Han Chuang excitedly leaned over and read, "Flying Dragon! Ha! So interesting. With this spear, Official Xiang's career will fly high."

Wu Fu respectfully replied, "It is a small gesture and please do not mind its little value."

Guiyan moved closer to Xiang Shaolong and pleaded, "Official Xiang! Can I make a spear pouch for you?"

Xiang Shaolong received the shield and lifted it twice. The shield is amazingly thin but extremely hard at the same time. Even if it is held for long hours, the holder will not feel tired at all. He was elated and thanked Wu Fu profusely.

Guiyan whined, "Official Xiang has not answered my question!"

Wu Fu smiled, "Official Xiang did not reject you so it is a yes. You have three days to produce the spear pouch and we will send the pouch and the spear together to Official Xiang's residence."

Guiyan pinched Xiang Shaolong gleefully.

Wu Fu apologised, "We have wasted some of your precious time. The two Lords and Official Guan are seated in the VIP seats in the rear garden awaiting Official Xiang. Will Marquis Han join Official Xiang's table?"

Han Chuang rejected, "I am here to drink with Prince Dan. Can Boss Wu give us some privacy? I have some confidential things to discuss with Official Xiang."



He whispered intimately to Bailei, "You are next." And slapped her bum heavily.

Bailei let out an exaggerated yelp.

Guiyan slipped out of Xiang Shaolong's bosom and cooed, "You must ask for me later!" Batting her eye lashes at him, she left the room with Wu Fu and Bailei and even closed the door for them.

Xiang Shaolong sat down again and could not help but feel some temptation. Even if Guiyan is not fully sincere, she knows how to make men feel good about themselves. Any other man will also be tempted.

Han Chuang softly smiled, "Wu Fu is really good and even brought his two best girls to accompany us. Even when we know that he is out to please you, we still fall into his trap willingly."

Xiang Shaolong felt the same and believed that with such men around, it is hard to be an uncorrupted official. He nodded, "Brother Han still did not tell me how you found out that I am Dong Horse Fanatic!"

Han Chuang revealed, "Someone saw you going to see Tian Dan and my suspicions are raised. I heard that you came out with an ugly expression on your face and Tian Dan rushed to see Lu Buwei immediately. Did something happen?"

Xiang Shaolong do not trust Han Chuang as much as he trusts Lord Longyang. He plainly state, "We have some slight disagreements! It is nothing serious."

Han Chuang sincerely commented, "If Brother Xiang wants to deal with Tian Dan or Li Yuan, you must not leave me out."

Xiang Shaolong responded, "If there is a need, I will definitely ask for your assistance."

Han Chuang's expression suddenly turned vicious and asked, "Has Brother Xiang heard of this man named Lao Ai?"

Xiang Shaolong recalled that Lao Ai seduced his concubine and was forced to escape to Xianyang City. He nodded to show that he has heard of him.

Han Chuang gritted his teeth, "This bastard is an ungrateful man who is worse than a beast. I treated him well and yet he eloped with my concubine. He even strangled her to death when she became a burden to him. Such a heartless fellow; I cannot wait to tear him to pieces. Unfortunately, he is hiding in the Premier Residence and I cannot do anything about it."

Xiang Shaolong guessed that he does not know that Lao Ai is now Zhu Ji's beloved. His constant patronage to this Drunken Wind Brothel must be due to Lao Ai and not because he likes to drink or womanize. He sighed, "Marquis must give up all hope. Lao Ai has entered the palace and is adored by Empress Ji. If you try to kill him, you will not return to Han alive."

Han Chuang trembled strongly and his eyes reddened, glowing with pain and agony. After some time, he dejectedly sighed, "I understand. In this case, I will return to Han

tomorrow. If Brother Xiang needs my assistance in any way, I will do my best as long as it is within my power.”

He softly added, “I still remembered and am grateful for your assistance in Handan City.”

Xiang Shaolong can never imagine that Han Chuang can be such a thankful person. He could not hold back and promised, “Brother Han can rest easy. I guarantee with my head that Lao Ai will die a horrible death within seven years. I will avenge Brother Han’s injustice.”

Han Chuang stared at him with disbelief for a while and finally nodded, “If these words come from anyone else, I will take it as a bad joke. But if they came from the mouth of Dong Horse Fanatic, I have absolutely no doubts about it.”

Both men stood up and Han Chuang finished, “Sister Jing may be with Pang Nuan now but the man she truly loves is the dead Dong Horse Fanatic. I have decided not to tell her the truth.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and an image of the pretty Zhao Empress appeared in his mind.

## CHAPTER 13

## An Evil Beauty

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WITH two pretty maids leading the way, Xiang Shaolong walked through a long corridor and stepped into a garden. The garden is filled with sounds of laughter and idle chatter.

Under the illumination of the lamps, Xiang Shaolong noticed that there are many different kinds of flowers planted in the garden. They are neatly arranged to give a sense of peace and tranquillity, soothing the minds of those who see them.

In the centre of the garden, there is a fake mountain and a fish pond. With the fresh green grass and insects chirping, it

is hard to imagine that this is the garden of a brothel. Xiang Shaolong was so comfortable that he thought that he had returned home.

The two maids leading the road are whispering and giggling to each other. They turned back occasionally to look and smile at him, trying to entice him.

Xiang Shaolong knew that women are naturally attracted to him. Moreover, he is the mighty Imperial Cavalry Commander. These girls will feel honoured if they are linked to him.

Ever since his promotion to this highly-sought-after post, he has been busy with work and family and did not have much time to know the common folks. Instead, all these work has been delegated to his men. Today, he finally get to know these commoners and felt the glory and intangible benefits of being the Imperial Cavalry Commander.

No wonder so many people are interested to be officials.

His men like Pu Bu and Liu Chao have benefitted from his glory too.

Going around the fake mountain, a two-storey building came into view. The entrance was guarded by dozens of Palace Guards and Infantry Soldiers who are the escorts of the Lords and Guan Zhongxie. Xiang Shaolong is familiar with them as he saw them quite often.

They may be standing guard outside the door but were not lonely at all as a group of maids are flirting with them,

creating a lively atmosphere. When they saw Xiang Shaolong coming alone, they stood at attention and paid their respects but could not hide the look of surprise on their faces.

When the maids announced his arrival, he smilingly strode into the main hall that was lighted with oil lamps.

Inside the wide hall, there were four seats situated on each side. The tables are full of dishes and wine.

Guan Zhongxie, Lord Changping and Lord Changwen are seated around the tables. When they saw him, they joyfully stood up and greeted him. The atmosphere is very friendly.

The ladies serving them drinks kneeled down and kowtowed humbly.

Guan Zhongxie laughed, "Official Xiang is late. Despite having a valid reason, we must still punish you with three cups of wine. When we compete in drinking later, you will not have an unfair advantage."

Xiang Shaolong found him to be more and more articulate and his words are full of reason. He smiled, "Official Guan's words are as powerful as your sword skills. I will do as you wish."

After he got seated, a beauty came from Guan Zhongxie's side and filled his wine cup.

Xiang Shaolong caught sight of the crystal clear wine being poured into his cup and was reminded about Brandy. Feeling exhilarated, he put his hand on the shoulder of the pretty

girl who was kneeling down beside him and pouring wine into his cup. He gently asked, "How do I address you?"

Opposite him, Lord Changping burst out laughing, "This is news indeed. So Shaolong is an expert with women."

Lord Changwen interrupted, "He has to be, otherwise how can he win Ji Yanran's affections? Big Brother should call him a brothel expert instead."

The beautiful courtesan batted her eyes at Xiang Shaolong and shyly answered, "My name is Yang Yu. Official Xiang must remember this."

Xiang Shaolong felt completely relaxed.

The past few days have been too stressful and he was almost broke down.

He needs to let his hair down and enjoy the nightlife of Xianyang City. He must forget about Shan Rou and numb himself in the brothel and forget about the world.

He finished his drink in one gulp.

Everyone was cheering for him.

Seated beside him, Guan Zhongxie turned his head and cut in, "Wait. Before the second cup, you must order your dish first."

Xiang Shaolong stared at the dishes on the table with surprise and curiously asked, "Aren't the dishes here already?"

Everyone was bowled over with laughter.

Lord Changwen was holding his stomach and suppressing his laughter. He stammered, "You have to order your women first. I suggest you limit yourself to two of them or you will not be able to wake up for the hunting fair tomorrow."

Guan Zhongxie added, "The Boss has reserved the best girls for your selection. The finest dishes are all available."

His words evoked another round of laughter.

Lord Changping advised, "If you wish, you can have our girls too. Since this is your first visit, we shall go lightly on you!"

The two girls beside him began to quarrel and the scene became slightly chaotic.

His two hands holding the second cup of wine Yang Yu poured for him, he weakly smiled, "I did not force any of you to give way to me! I will not make things difficult for anyone. I will only need Miss Guiyan to drink with me. At the stroke of midnight, I have to return home."

Yang Yu, the other courtesans and the accompanying maids started to protest loudly.

Guan Zhongxie sighed, "Unless Official Xiang is going to fight his way out, the brothel girls will not let you sleep in your own bed tonight."

As Yang Yu filled the third cup of wine for Xiang Shaolong, she softly invited, "Shall I accompany Official Xiang to sleep tonight?"



Xiang Shaolong finished his drink in one gulp and bitterly smiled, "It is not that I am unwilling but I have my difficulties. My injured leg has yet to recover and I am really sorry. Will everyone please forgive me?"

Guan Zhongxie apologised, "It is us who have mistaken him. We should all drink as a punishment."

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed Guan Zhongxie for using this excuse to verify his leg injury without exposing his true intention. They began to toast each other and Xiang Shaolong drank as well.

Yang Yu gently reminded, "Official must come back and look for me." She lowered her head and returned to Guan Zhongxie's side in a charming manner.

Lord Changwen remarked, "There is a dish that Shaolong must definitely order or we will all be disappointed. That will be Xianyang City's top courtesan Dan Meimei."

Xiang Shaolong is certain that Guan Zhongxie will be observing his reaction to this name so he can deduce whether he knows about Wu Tingwei and Dan Meimei's relationship. He pretended to be surprised and laughed, "I must be working too hard. How come I have never heard of her name?"

Every lady present is jealous of Dan Meimei and cheered when they heard this, adding to the festive atmosphere.

Guan Zhongxie was speechless, "Luckily, Dan Meimei did not hear this or she will reject your invitation and she will cover

her ears whenever she hears your name in the future. Men! Invite Miss Guiyan and Miss Dan Meimei for Official Xiang. I am the host tonight and we must give our guests the very best.”

His words are slightly overbearing but it still sounds comfortable and acceptable.

The maids received his order and left.

Guan Zhongxie clapped loudly three times and the hall quietened down instantly.

The female musicians seated near the door may be slightly older but still retain some charm and elegance. It is not surprising Drunken Wind Brothel has been named Xianyang City's top brothel. If not for their official ranks, they are not fit to be seated where they are.

The female musicians begin to play a melody.

The two doors of the main hall were thrown open and a large group of courtesans ran in like a bunch of butterflies flying in. The spring in their steps signifies youth and liveliness, and they were a pleasing sight.

Xiang Shaolong scrutinized them carefully and could tell that they are around the age of eighteen and nineteen. Every one of them has an excellent complexion and nice skin.

In these warring times, men are more highly regarded than women. As a result, many poor families resort to selling their daughters. When Xiang Shaolong first ran into Tao Fang, he was acquiring beauties from all over the world. The

courtesans in front of him are possibly acquired in the same manner.

Thinking about this, he could not help but recalled the pitiful Ting Fangshi. Agonized, he wished he could leave immediately.

He was still feeling sad as the music gradually stopped and the courtesans bade farewell and left.

Their beautiful companions began to fill up their wine cups.

An attendant announced, "Miss Guiyan has arrived!"

Xiang Shaolong composed himself and gazed at Guiyan sashaying in. He thought about her name and the possible meaning behind it. He guessed that Guiyan<sup>2</sup> is not a Qin native but gave herself this name to remind her of her hometown.

Guiyan paid her respects to everyone and joyfully sat down besides Xiang Shaolong. All the other girls present have an envious look on their faces.

Xiang Shaolong did not have a chance to say anything yet when Guiyan leaned on him and poured another cup of wine. Smiling brightly, she toasted, "I am grateful for your appreciation. Let me drink a toast to you!"

Guan Zhongxie and the two Lords burst out laughing.

---

<sup>2</sup> Translator note, Gui = Belong. Guiyan = Belonging to Yan.

Lord Changwen explained, "This is called intoxication with both women and wine. Shaolong may eventually risk his injury and stay overnight at Drunken Wind Brothel!"

Guiyan was shocked, "Official Xiang is injured?"

Xiang Shaolong sniffed at her fragrance and was slightly uneasy. Guiyan is a very charming lady, especially when she is trying her best to seduce you. In the past, Zhao Mu used Zhao Ya and a strong aphrodisiac to try to harm him. The best trick in the book is the Beauty Trap.

Thinking about this, he recalled Guan Zhongxie's sharp eyes staring at him when Dan Meimei's name is mentioned. It was a really close shave.

He was really complacent. If the wine he drank earlier was poisoned, he will be dead in no time.

Mo Ao is a poisons expert. He may even create a poison that will only react a few days later. If that happens, no one will suspect Guan Zhongxie is his murderer.

Guiyan noticed his expression changing and thought that his leg was in pain. She swallowed some wine herself from a cup and pass the same cup of wine to him, advising, "Wine can lessen your pain. Please have a drink."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved that she had drunk from the same cup and finished the cup of wine.

His mind began to think furiously.

To bribe a courtesan to harm him, the Imperial Cavalry Commander, is not an easy task. The entire brothel may be forced to close down and it will have huge repercussions. Moreover, Guan Zhongxie will not take such a risk. If he wants someone to kill Xiang Shaolong on his behalf, the only possibility is Dan Meimei. She has been bewitched by Lao Ai and will obey his orders without question.

Lord Changwen smiled, "Guiyan is so sweet; Shaolong should reward her with a kiss."

Guiyan pretended to whine and collapsed into Xiang Shaolong's bosom. Her left hand hugging his solid waist and her right hand hugging his thick neck, she raised her pretty face and closed her eyes, breathing heavily with anticipation.

With her large breasts pressing against his body and witnessing her horny face, Xiang Shaolong was aroused and kissed her once on the lips.

Everyone clapped and cheered loudly.

Guiyan released him reluctantly and whined, "Official is so stingy." She lowered her head and added, "Official is even more muscular than lions and tigers!"

The attendant announced, "Miss Dan Meimei has arrived!"

The entire hall quietened down and every single pair of eyes turned towards the main door.

Accompanied by the sounds of her accessories tinkling, a tall woman sauntered towards them.

Xiang Shaolong took a look at her and was taken aback.

Dan Meimei is around the age of twenty with chiselled good looks, the sweetest smile and the most loving lips. She has an innocent aura that makes all men feel like protecting her from harm. Now that she is here, she has become the glowing moon while every other girl is just a shimmering star.

The music started to play.

Dan Meimei twisted and turned her body around and began dancing.

Under the lamp's illumination, the golden birds embroidered on her clothes seemed to have a life on their own and are flying around the room, making her resemble an angel from heaven.

Dan Meimei, the most popular courtesan of Xianyang City, began to strike certain seductive postures. Out of a sudden, she started singing.

Her voice is pure and refreshing, adding to her sensuality.

Xiang Shaolong could catch some parts of the lyrics. The song is about a young lady bathing in the river and thinking about her beloved. She received a flute from her lover which is engraved with a pair of loving mandarin ducks, making her even more madly in love with him.

Coupled with her dance gestures and her enchanting expression, Dan Meimei was absolutely mesmerizing and even Xiang Shaolong is captivated by her.

Her beauty and grace is just one notch lower than Ji Yanran and Qin Qing. Xiang Shaolong did not expect such a beauty to be found in a brothel.

With her beauty and performing ability, a rich man could have easily brought her home and add her to his harem. Why does she still need to work for a living?

She continued singing, "Anyone can share my blanket while I think of my beloved. My fate has been decided."

Her beautiful singing slowly ended and everyone regained their self-control and cheered wildly for her.

Dan Meimei paid her respects to everyone and tip toed to Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong reminded himself that this beauty before him is a vicious and evil woman in disguise. He stood up clapping and smiled, "Welcome, Miss Dan."

Dan Meimei giggled and her eyes gazed towards his face. The moment she got a closer look, her eyes lighted up with a mixture of fear, appreciation, doubt and hesitation.

Xiang Shaolong is even more suspicious of Dan Meimei and is certain that she will be poisoning him as ordered by Guan Zhongxie and Mo Ao. Otherwise, she will not have such a strange look in her eyes.

Her eyes cannot hide the truth. With Xiang Shaolong looking for tell-tale signs, she had inadvertently revealed the truth.

When Dan Meimei laid her eyes on Xiang Shaolong, she was shocked as he reminded her of Lao Ai. But to her, Xiang Shaolong is even better than Lao Ai as he has a heroic air around him.

Dan Meimei intentionally avoided his gaze and lowered her head. She came to Xiang Shaolong's side and kneeled down.

Xiang Shaolong peeped quickly at Guan Zhongxie and saw him staring at Dan Meimei with a nervous look in his eyes. He must have suspected that Dan Meimei is attracted to Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong bended down and reached out, holding onto her firm shoulders and helped her up.

Dan Meimei raised her head and politely greeted, "Dan Meimei pays her respects to Official Xiang!"

She lowered her head again gently but in a pitiful manner.

But Xiang Shaolong knew that she has a guilty conscience and could not stand his righteous staring.

Lord Changping smiled, "Dan Meimei must have been moved by Official Xiang to be so shy and quiet."

Lord Changwen added, "Has Official Xiang's leg undergone a miracle healing?"

Everyone laughed at his sentence.

As Xiang Shaolong supported her to sit down, Guan Zhongxie suggested, "A beauty should match a hero. Meimei should offer Official Xiang a welcome toast."



Xiang Shaolong continued to observe Dan Meimei every little move. Her body trembled slightly when she heard Guan Zhongxie's suggestion and was agitated. He was amused that Guan Zhongxie was afraid of her backing out and was forcing her to poison Xiang Shaolong at once.

Mo Ao is truly brilliant. If Xiang Shaolong did not know that Dan Meimei is Lao Ai's mistress, he would die a wrongful death.

Dan Meimei hesitated for a while and finally her pair of jade hands appeared from her long sleeves and went ahead to pour some wine for Xiang Shaolong.

Observing a delicate hairpin inserted into a bun of her shiny black hair and smelling her womanly scent, Xiang Shaolong is beginning to detest Guan Zhongxie for forcing this beauty to commit such an atrocious act.

Dan Meimei's jade hands trembled slightly.

On his other side, Guiyan whispered intimately into Xiang Shaolong's ear, "Official has forgotten all about me!"

Xiang Shaolong chain of thoughts was disrupted by her. When she finished speaking, his hand snaked over, embracing her slender waist while he kissed her on her neck.

At this point, Dan Meimei raised a cup of wine and cooed, "Meimei will first drink half a cup to represent my respect for you. Official Xiang shall finish the rest."

She raised the cup with one hand and put the other hand into her sleeve. With a magnificent posture, she lifted the cup and drank from it without making any noise.

Xiang Shaolong focused hard and saw the other hand fiddling in the sleeve. He is certain that she is taking this chance to add poison to the wine.

She lowered her sleeve and now held the cup with both hands, sending the cup to Xiang Shaolong's lips but she looked down away from him.

Lord Changping clapped and cheered loudly.

Xiang Shaolong peered down at the cup half-filled with wine and had a sudden brainwave.

Should he expose the truth about the poisoned wine? This will be the best chance to destroy Guan Zhongxie.

# VOLUME 14

## CHAPTER 1

### Xiayang Happenings

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANGSHAOLONG took a closer look at the cup of wine Dan Meimei presented to him but could not see anything unusual.

He did not believe that the poison will dissolve into the wine immediately. However, all he can rely on is the illumination of the oil lamp, which makes it more difficult for him to scrutinise the wine.

He gave up the idea of exposing Guan Zhongxie. He wasn't intimidated by him as he is confident that he can make Dan Meimei confess that Guan Zhongxie to be the mastermind behind the poisoning.

The problem is by doing so; it is equivalent to openly opposing Lu Buwei. Their underground battle will come to light.

Remembering that Lu Buwei has another several years of ultimate power, he decided to play safe for the time being.

Moreover, this issue may become even more complicated and even affect Lao Ai indirectly.

At the same time, he wonders if he can pretend to drink the poisonous wine. This will make Guan Zhongxie and Mo Ao leave him alone for time being. When the matter has passed, it will cause confusion among them. They may be misled into thinking that Xiang Shaolong is immune to poison or that Dan Meimei did not poison him in the first place. Their infighting will only benefit him.

These thoughts flashed through his mind very quickly and he reached a decision in a split second.

Xiang Shaolong held the poisonous wine with one hand and embraced Dan Meimei's waist with the other and laughed,

“Miss Meimei needs to drink another mouthful of wine to make it exactly half a cup.”

With his back to Guiyan and Guan Zhongxie, he forced Dan Meimei to take another sip of wine.

All the colour in Dan Meimei’s face disappeared and she strongly fought back and protested, “Official Xiang is so barbaric!”

Xiang Shaolong took the chance to release his hold on her. As Dan Meimei has been resisting fiercely all the while, she lost her balance and fell on the floor.

While everybody is focusing on Dan Meimei, Xiang Shaolong swiftly flicked his wrist and scattered the wine under the table. At the same instant, he pretended to help Dan Meimei up and concealed his extra movement. His cover-up was perfect.

Dan Meimei sat upright in shock and was speechless.

Xiang Shaolong laughed loudly, “It is my fault for causing Miss to fall down. I deserved to be punished!”

He raised his cup and pretended to drink the poisonous wine.

Opposite him, Lord Changping sighed, “Official Xiang is really amazing. This is the first time I saw Dan Meimei lying down on the floor in front of everyone.” Everyone burst out in laughter at his comments.

Xiang Shaolong put down his wine cup and noticed Dan Meimei's head still lowered with guilt. She did this to prevent others from witnessing the fear and unease in her eyes.

On his left, Guiyan poured more wine for him.

Guan Zhongxie smiled, "If Official Xiang can bear with some pain, I am sure Dan Meimei will lie down again tonight!"

The two Lords broke out in more laughter while the other girls are expressing a mixture of smiles and jealousy.

Xiang Shaolong embraced Dan Meimei's slender waist and placed another cup of wine beside her lip, gently saying, "Please forgive me by drinking this cup of wine!"

Dan Meimei parted her sexy lips and stared at him with mixed emotions in her eyes. She then drank the entire cup of wine silently.

Everyone cheered loudly.

On his other side, Guiyan was annoyed, "Official Xiang is so biased!"

Xiang Shaolong could see that Guan Zhongxie was not suspicious of him and was secretly happy. He boasted, "I am the most unbiased man. Come! Let me serve Miss Guiyan in drinking wine too."

Lord Changwen egged, "You should feed her wine from your mouth to make it more interesting."

Guiyan chortled and actually lay down on Xiang Shaolong's lap with an inviting and seductive look on her face. Luckily, her position did not affect his injured leg.

Although a beautiful woman is lying on his lap, Xiang Shaolong is not the least aroused. Firstly, he was busy peeping at Dan Meimei and Guan Zhongxie's reaction. Secondly, he knew that Guiyan is sent here to please him, the mighty Imperial Cavalry Commander, and is full of insincerity.

Guiyan may not be as pretty as Dan Meimei but is considered the second prettiest among all the girls present. Only Guan Zhongxie's Yang Yu can be considered on par with her. He could not resist taking advantage of her and poured a cup of wine into his mouth without swallowing it. He then lowered his head, matched her lips and let the wine slowly trickle out of his mouth.

Guiyan moaned slightly and drank the wine skilfully. It is really not easy to drink wine lying down and it must be quite challenging for her.

With everyone cheering him on, Xiang Shaolong was about to withdraw when out of a sudden, Guiyan grabbed him tightly and forced some wine back into his mouth.

Xiang Shaolong was very aroused and forgot about his inhibitions. He sent his tongue into her mouth and they frenched for a while before separating.

Everyone cheered wildly.

Guiyan leaned on him weakly and seductively whined, "Can Official Xiang stay here tonight? I guarantee that your injury will not be affected."

As she was whining into his ear, only Dan Meimei on his other side can hear the words she mentioned. Dan Meimei trembled slightly and lowered her head again, as if she is lamenting over Xiang Shaolong's impending death and that she is his murderer.

Xiang Shaolong kissed Guiyan's forehead and smiled, "If you do not make love wholeheartedly, it is not worth it."

His hand snaked over and hugged Dan Meimei again and feigned surprise, "Is something bothering Miss Meimei?"

Dan Meimei was stunned and sadly replied, "Official Xiang only has eyes for Sister Guiyan so I am naturally upset."

Guan Zhongxie hurriedly spoke up for her, "Official Xiang is truly impressive and can even make Dan Meimei jealous. We brothers are all in awe of your talents."

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed him for calling himself his brother. Lord Changwen smiled, "Looks like Official Xiang has to feed her a cup of wine too."

Xiang Shaolong thought that he might as well go all the way and tempt this female murderess. He prepared and held another cup of wine in his mouth and leaned over to match Dan Meimei's lips. After he finished feeding her the wine in his mouth, he refused to let her go and frenched her deeply.



Using all his kissing technique and tricks he learnt in the 21st century, he did his best to tempt and arouse her.

Dam Meimei's cold demeanour melted and starting burning with passion.

Xiang Shaolong knew that with his kissing skills and his impending death, Dan Meimei will feel even more remorseful and may even really fall in love with him.

After some time, tears can be seen in the corner of her eyes, affirming that she was forced to poison him.

Xiang Shaolong did not want to leave yet as he is concerned that the spilt wine under the table has not evaporated yet.

Guiyan came over to fondle him too. Inspired, Xiang Shaolong spilled another cup of wine under the table to hide the earlier spill.

After a series of caressing, Dan Meimei surprising excused herself and took her leave.

Without this popular babe, the Lords were less enthusiastic compared to before. Xiang Shaolong took the chance to take his leave too.

Whether she is sincere or putting up an act, Guiyan actually sent him all the way to the front courtyard. She made him promised to come back for her before she allowed him to board Lord Changwen's carriage.

Suddenly, Xiang Shaolong finds himself more and more interested in this ancient 'Black Leopard Bar.'

Back at the Command Centre, he met Teng Yi who is on night shift and told him everything that happened. Teng Yi was relieved, "What a close call!"

He added, "We are too rigid and kept thinking that he will only attack us during the hunting fair. To think that he will use the Beauty Trap tonight. If we know more about the poison, we can trick them instead."

Xiang Shaolong affirmed, "The poison will take effect after the fair."

Teng Yi was stunned, "What makes you so sure?"

Xiang Shaolong explained; "Tu Xian informed me that Mo Ao has constructed a kind of tool that can kill underwater. It is meant for you and Jing Jun. When I die of poisoning later, there will be no one in Wu Family to counter them in the future."

Teng Yi was incensed, "If Mo Ao survives the hunting fair, I will change my surname to his."

Xiang Shaolong's expression darkened, "We have always been thinking about ourselves. If they planned to assassinate Lu Gong and Xu Xian too, it will be disastrous."

Teng Yi breathed out in shock, "Will Lu Buwei be so daring?"

Xiang Shaolong remarked, "Normally, he always play safe. But with the chaos caused by Lord Gaoling's rebellion, he can easily push the blame to him. With his devious scheming, this is an opportunity he will not bypass."

Thinking about this, he became impatient and stood up, declaring, "I need to see Lu Gong now and warn him."

Teng Yi suggested, "I think you should see Xu Xian instead. In terms of intelligence, Lu Gong is way behind him. If he believes us, they will take the appropriate countermeasures."

Xiang Shaolong found it reasonable and left the Command Centre under the escorts of the Eighteen Guardians and a few hundred Cavalry soldiers. Pretending to patrol the City, he rode towards Xu Xian's Left Premier Residence.

As the Imperial Cavalry Commander, he is responsible for all security matters in the City except for the palace.

As the dinner appointment ended early, it is only twelve plus now. Except for the brothel areas, the remaining streets are deserted except for the occasional horse carriage.

At the Left Premier Residence, Xu Xian met him in the inner hall. This famous Great General of Qin smiled, "I knew Shaolong would look for me before the hunting fair."

Xiang Shaolong was taken aback, "Why is Premier Xu so certain?"

Xu Xian sighed, "Since Mu Gong ruled Qin, we become a serious contender for power. Unfortunately, the roads to the east were heavily fortified by Jing so we focused on attacking the western lands. Finally, we conquered the other twelve states and gain plenty of territory. By the time Mu Gong passed away, we have amassed almost every piece of land

on both sides of the Wei River. Since then, we did not conquer any new territories for over two hundred years. We can blame the enemy but it is actually our inability to overcome them. If you are powerful, who dare not succumb to you? It is as simple as that.”

Xiang Shaolong had no idea about history during those times and kept nodding his head.

Xu Xian became more enthusiastic and lectured, “When the eastern lands are divided, we should take the chance to attack them. It is a pity that the Qin court is in trouble and power was in the hands of evil ministers. Within forty years, we have a King who committed suicide, a Crown Prince denied of his succession, another King who was killed in the wilderness along with the Empress Dowager. Taking advantage of our internal strife, Wei invaded us and we lost all territories west of the river.”

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to understand Xu Xian’s mindset. Lu Buwei is walking along the same old path. Whether Lu Buwei can control the Qin court or even remove Xiao Pan, ultimately, Qin cannot unite the world. This is Xu Xian’s main concern.

Xu Xian stood up and mentioned in a deep voice, “Shaolong! Let’s take a walk in the rear garden!”

Xiang Shaolong’s goose pimples stood up and knew that he has something confidential to say to him.

Under the bright moonlight, the two men strolled slowly in the rear garden.

Xu Xian sighed, "We are just as barbaric as Rongdi and can be extremely stubborn. Xianyang City may be a beautiful city but it is just a nice cover for our rough ways. If the city is gone, you will see our uncivilised lifestyle and customs. Fortunately, Xiao Gong implemented Shang Yang's reforms and imposed harsh laws to make us learn how to respect rules. He built up our army and emphasized on military contributions that make us invincible wherever our armies go. Now, Lu Buwei entered the picture and kept promoting his own men. He even invited the inferior representatives from the six states to Qin, flattered them and secretly conspired with them. These actions are unfavourable to our state. I have read his Spring and Autumn Annals of Lu. Hng! If Shang Yang comes back to life, he will burn them at once."

Xiang Shaolong finally learnt about another set of thinking other than Lu Gong's Qin racism. It is a clash of culture. Lu Buwei has been too arrogant and did not consider the feelings of the Qin people.

The Qin people he met are honest, straightforward and do not employ schemes. Xu Xian, Lu Gong, Wang He, Lord Changping, Lord Changwen and An Gu are all alike.

Lu Buwei, Mo Ao, Guan Zhongxie and Lao Ai are all scheming people.

Qin's invincibility comes from their strong family relations coupled with Shang Yang's reforms.

Lu Buwei uses military men like Guan Zhongxie and Lu Xiong who are all his own subordinates. Moreover, Lu Xiong's

denial of his wrongdoing is something Qin people detests the most.

Xiao Pan's strict punishment of Lu Xiong thus earned him the respect of the Qin people.

Xu Xian stopped walking and gazed at Xiang Shaolong before mentioning, "I am not against Lu Buwei because he is an outsider. Shang Yang is from Wei but he is someone I respect the most."

Xiang Shaolong nodded, "I understand Premier Xu's thinking."

Xu Xian shook his head and sighed, "Lu Buwei is too simple-minded. He thought that by poisoning the King, Qin will belong to him. Thankfully, Heaven has not abandoned us yet and gave us a capable ruler Crown Prince Zheng. Even at the sacrifice of my own life, I will ensure Crown Prince Zheng will be coroneted as the King of Qin."

Xiang Shaolong was shocked, "From Premier Xu's words, our situation seems to be life-threatening."

Xu Xian led him to sit down on some stones beside a small bridge and whispered, "Initially, I am not worried. But because of the uprising in the eastern provinces, Lu Buwei has sent Meng Ao, Wang He and all our nearby forces to crush the rebels. Now, there is only the Palace Guards, Imperial Cavalry and Imperial Infantry protecting the capital. This is the most dangerous situation I have ever seen."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "From what I know, the uprising is a scheme by Lord Gaoling and Zhao General Pang Nuan. Didn't Lu Buwei mention this?"

Xu Xian's face become clouded and commented, "That's true but we all know Lord Gaoling's ability. Ten Lord Gaolings are still inferior to half a Lu Buwei. Lu Buwei is not someone who will be taken by surprise at the rebellion and send troops hastily to defend the provinces."

Xiang Shaolong can feel his body turning cold and softly asked, "Premier Xu is saying that..."

Xu Xian concluded, "This has something to do with Lu Buwei. As long as Lu Buwei can time this scheme with Lord Gaoling's rebellion, he can control him like a puppet."

Xu Xian's face became more solemn and he added, "If Lu Buwei can kill you and your assistant Commanders, both Imperial Armies will land in his hands. What do you think will happen to Xianyang City? That is why I can guess that you will visit me before the hunting fair. If you are really not Lu Buwei's lackey, you should sense something amiss with your level of intelligence. Does Shaolong understand?"

Xiang Shaolong has a second close shave. It is not easy to gain Xu Xian's trust. It is only until now that he fully believed that Xiang Shaolong is opposing Lu Buwei. He must be guarding against Lu Buwei's spying.

After an awkward silence, he replied, "Thanks for Premier Xu's trust."

He still has some doubts and asked, "Even if both armies belong to Lu Buwei, they will not necessarily obey him if he wants to overthrow the Crown Prince."

Xu Xian sighed, "Shaolong is still inexperienced. Unless Lu Buwei has full control of the military, he will not dare to harm the Crown Prince. But if he can kill Lu Gong and me and push the entire blame to Lord Gaoling, he will control the Qin court. Meng Ao is his lackey and Wang He the foolish asshole dare not oppose him. With the Empress supporting him, there is nothing he dare not do."

His eyes flashed energetically and state, "He who acts first is in control; he who acts later is controlled."

As long as Lu Buwei is alive, everyone will suffer. The history of Qin will repeat as long as power is held in the hands of unscrupulous ministers.

Xiang Shaolong nearly groaned.

From Xu Xian's point of view, everything is well-analyzed and the strategies are appropriate.

However, Xiang Shaolong knew that before Xiao Pan's coronation, nobody could kill Lu Buwei.

If he cannot kill him, he will be killed. What kind of choice is this?

He hated himself for not being able to use this reason to persuade Xu Xian. How can he explain to Xu Xian that history books have recorded that Lu Buwei will live for several more years?



While he is agonizing, Xu Xian continued, "As long as Crown Prince nods his head, Lu Buwei will not survive these three days."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Has Premier Xu thought about the consequences?"

Xu Xian coldly snorted, "There are three obstacles. They are Empress Ji, Meng Ao and Du Bi. Du Bi is the biggest headache. With Lu Buwei gone, he will support Chongqiao to be the Crown Prince. If not for this consideration, Lu Gong and I would have acted when the late King passed away. Of course! Wang He has been dissuading us from doing this. Therefore, I hope you will persuade Crown Prince. You are, after all, the person he trusts the most."

Xiang Shaolong suggested, "I have another plan in mind. First, we must conduct the blood test and prove that Crown Prince and Lu Buwei are not related at all. Secondly, we must kill Lu Buwei's top advisor. With this man gone, Lu Buwei is like a tiger without teeth and claws and his prowess will be limited. Thirdly, we will..."

Xu Xian waved his hand and interrupted him, "Are you referring to Mo Ao?"

Xiang Shaolong was astounded, "Premier Xu has heard of this man?"

Xu Xian simply dismissed, "If I have never heard of him, how would I dare to oppose Lu Buwei? It will be great if we can kill Guan Zhongxie too. Unfortunately, we are all guarding

against each other secretly. If we openly fight, it will be hard to tell who the winner is.”

Xiang Shaolong knew that based on this point, he can still dissuade this clever man. He whispered, “Thirdly, we will support Lao Ai and use him to counter Lu Buwei. As long as we can drag everything until the coronation date, Lu Buwei will be the eventual loser.”

Xu Xian was blown away, “Isn’t Lao Ai a lackey of Lu Buwei?”

Xiang Shaolong revealed his whole scheme to him and added, “I even recommended Crown Prince to name Lu Buwei the Premier Mentor to curb his ambitions.”

Xu Xian inhaled a deep breath and stared at Xiang Shaolong as if this is the first time they met. Assessing him for a while, his eyes glowed and he remarked, “In terms of scheming, Mo Ao is inferior to you. No wonder you can still live healthily until today.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly felt guilty and smiled, “Luckily, I did not finish one special cup of wine tonight or I would have failed your expectations.”

Xu Xian pressed for an explanation and he revealed everything that has happened.

After he finished listening, Xu Xian nodded in agreement, “You are right. If Mo Ao does not die, we will die under his hands one day. From my estimates, the poisoned wine will take effect after seven days. King Xiaowen drank Lu Buwei’s medicine and died from breathing difficulties seven days

later. There has never been any poison that takes effect after seven days so even with our suspicions; there is no evidence to indicate Lu Buwei to be the mastermind. Ai! Now, nobody dares to eat food from Lu Buwei. It is really strange. The medication that King Xiaowen drank was also tested by an attendant. Why didn't the attendant die of poisoning too?"

Xiang Shaolong had to admit that Mo Ao's poisoning skills are many times better than the dead Zhao Mu. Even if it is a slow-reacting poison, there will still be traces of poisoning when the poison has entered the stomach. How can there be a poison that will only react seven days later? Even in the 21st century, it is still not possible.

The only likelihood is that the poison is carefully wrapped in a special capsule. When the capsule is in the stomach, it will stay there for some time before it leaks the poison and take the life of the person.

Thinking about this, he was agitated. He wished he could immediately rush back to Drunken Wind Brothel and investigate the area where he spilled the poisonous wine and see if there is really such a capsule there.

Xu Xian noticed his countenance changing and implored, "What have you thought of?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I am thinking of how to persuade Premier Xu to delay his plans to attack Lu Buwei."

Xu Xian smiled, "I am not a brainless fighter. Since Shaolong has such a brilliant plan, Lu Gong and I will hold our plans

back. But if you cannot kill Mo Ao, it will be our turn to attack Lu Buwei. It is better to die fighting for something you believe in than die an unexplainable death at home.”

Xiang Shaolong beat his chest and swore, “Give me ten days! I may be able to use his own poison against himself and let him die a mysterious death!”

Surprised, Xu Xian stared at him speechlessly.

## CHAPTER 2

## Re-visiting The Brothel

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG agilely leapt over the wall and landed in the garden of Drunken Wind Brothel.

It is two am in the morning and the several entertainment buildings behind the main building are still lighted and filled with sounds of music and singing.

Xiang Shaolong took some time before he could determine the exact building Guan Zhongxie had hosted him earlier. Strangely, the building is still lighted. Xiang Shaolong was

perplexed, thinking that another batch of guests is now occupying their room.

Curious, he took advantage of the shadows of the trees and bushes to creep nearer to the building. As silent as a mouse, he finally reached the perimeter of the building and hurriedly prone down with his heart thumping wildly.

He was taken by surprise by several strongmen guarding the main door and he could recognize some of them to be Lu Buwei's personal escorts.

Is Lu Buwei here?

He peered harder into the darkness and noticed that the building was securely guarded by men in all four corners.

Of course, they do not pose an obstacle to an elite soldier like him who can climb walls and swing from buildings.

He scrutinized his surroundings and chose a tall tree besides the building. He stealthily shimmied up the tree and shot his grappling hook onto a roof tile. Once the rope is tightened, he carefully glided onto the roof and peeped into the building through one of the ventilation gaps.

He was so completely overwhelmed by what he saw that his body turned cold immediately and he nearly fell off the roof.

Under the illumination of the bright oil lamps, he saw Guan Zhongxie, Mo Ao, Brothel Owner Wu Fu, Guiyan and Dan Meimei analyzing the spilled wine under the table.

Wu Fu sighed, "Mister Mo is truly a genius. First, you advised me to use precious gifts to lower his guard; then we misled him that Meimei is going to poison him when the real culprit is Guiyan."

Guan Zhongxie commented, "I am full of respect for Brother Mo's abilities. Now, that kid thought that he had managed to escape our poisoning and will lower his guard. What a thrilling outcome!"

The main door opened and a delighted Lu Buwei strolled in arrogantly.

As Xiang Shaolong was totally flabbergasted at this revelation, Dan Meimei gracefully leaped into the arms of Lu Buwei and cooed, "Meimei has scored a huge merit for Premier Lu. How do you plan to reward me?"

Lu Buwei hugged her slender waist before patting her hips and laughed : "Fine! Then let me serve you in bed tonight!"

Mo Ao's hand snaked out and embraced Guiyan, adding : "Premier must not forget our dear Guiyan. Without her skilful tongue, Xiang Shaolong will not be tricked."

Above them, Xiang Shaolong was nearly fainting. How he wished he can jump straight down and slaughter all of them at once.

Heaven!

There is a poison pill in his stomach now. He had no knowledge of surgery and his death is imminent.

Still embracing Dan Meimei, Lu Buwei walked over to the spilled wine and took a closer look. He chortled : “Xiang Shaolong, even with your intelligence, you are only good enough to be my puppet. You made a mistake when you thought you have discarded the poisoned wine. When the poison takes effect, you will die an unexplainable death.”

Xiang Shaolong had a brainwave and saw a ray of hope.

If the pill is stuck in his throat, he can still survive.

Guan Zhongxie remarked : “Miss Meimei’s performance is brilliant. I am almost convinced by your acting too.”

Lu Buwei leaned forward and kissed her tightly on the lips, making her squirm and aroused.

Guan Zhongxie clapped Wu Fu’s shoulder and smiled : “When everything is over, Boss Wu will surely be promoted to a high official post!”

Wu Fu gave his thanks and worriedly asked, “Is there a chance that he may spit the pill out?”

Leaning on Mo Ao, Guiyan assured : “Boss can put your mind at ease. The pill is very sticky and if not for his tongue entering my mouth, I will not be able to feed him the pill too.”

Mo Ao revealed, “The weakness of the pill is that it sticks to the bottom of the wine cup. Otherwise, Little Yan need not feed him with your tongue and let him take advantage of you.”



Guan Zhongxie laughed : “He only took a little advantage. The big advantage will be taken by you tonight!”

All the men laughed while the ladies protested.

Xiang Shaolong was in a state of panic. He could not wait to leave and remove the pill from his throat.

What an excellent plan! In the midst of all the kissing, he was intoxicated and did not realize that it was a kiss of death.

He was too careless and did not anticipate his opponent to guess that he knows Dan Meimei’s background. His earlier antics looked so ridiculous now.

Lu Buwei smiled : “The night is painfully short. Mister Mo should retire to Guiyan’s room and serve her well for her hard work.”

He faced Wu Fu and added : “You have done well. I will see to your reward.”

Laughing, he left with Dan Meimei still his in arms.

Xiang Shaolong groaned loudly.

From his open mouth, Teng Yi used a pair of bronze clippers to extract a black pill and put it on a plate. The pill is extremely small and it is about the size of a housefly.

Besides him, Tao Fang, Jing Jun, Pu Bu, Liu Chao, etc sighed with relief at the close shave.

Xiang Shaolong’s throat was scrapped and he could not say anything for the time being.

Teng Yi raised the pill to eye level and everyone clustered around to have a closer look.

Jing Jun viciously demanded : “What can we do to put this pill in Mo Ao’s throat?”

Xiang Shaolong cleared his throat and spoke in a hoarse voice, “If this pill is put in a wine cup, it will stick to the bottom. However, it did not happen to King Xiaowen’s bowl of medicine.”

Tao Fang happily exclaimed, “In this case, we can find out the recipe and use the same herbs but improve on its stickiness. Once we can make it stick only upon reaching the throat, it will be a piece of cake to kill Mo Ao. The recipe can be preserved for other uses too.”

Teng Yi was shaken and glanced at Xiang Shaolong. They thought of Tu Xian and shook their heads at the same time.

If Tu Xian can poison Mo Ao without any difficulty, Mo Ao will be dead long ago.

Pu Bu interceded, “Even if we can improve the stickiness; it is still insufficient. How can we convince him to drink it in the first place?”

Xiang Shaolong concluded, “Let’s act according to circumstances. I will carry the pill at all times and poison him whenever possible. It is late! Let’s have some rest to have enough stamina to face Mo Ao’s devilish schemes tomorrow. Second Brother and Little Jun must be especially alert.”

Everyone agreed in unison and retired to their respective bedrooms.

Back at his own chamber, Xiang Shaolong was reminded of Ji Yanran and his other pretty wives. Deep in thought, he was abruptly disturbed by a shrill voice, "Master is back!"

Xiang Shaolong turned around in surprise and saw Zhou Wei lying on one side of his bed. Her clothes are slightly ruffled and she must have been sleeping before he came into the room. Staring at her tempting figure, Xiang Shaolong was agonized.

Since the deaths of Zhao Qian and the maids, he was mentally tormented and spent a year in living hell. Moreover, he was discouraged at his lack of success in battling Lu Buwei. He no longer wished to add the burden of new relationships to his existing heavy load.

That is the same way he feels about Qin Qing and Ying Ying.

He may have promised the Changping Brothers to woo Ying Ying but it is an obligation and not resulting from his true passion. Additionally, he is not confident of winning her from Guan Zhongxie.

Presently, Zhou Wei is giving him the biggest headache.

From her characteristics, Xiang Shaolong deduced that she is a stubborn girl with plenty of self respect. She will either love him or hate him to the core.

Fortunately, their relationship is just starting out and he can still worm his way out. He coughed, "It is so late and you should go back to sleep."

Zhou Wei got up and paid her respects to him. She proceeded to gently undress his cloak and cheerfully replied, "I slept already and am very energetic now. Master Tao has assigned a rear room for me. Shall I help you take a shower?"

By the time she finished speaking, her two cheeks have turned completely red.

Xiang Shaolong lamented secretly that he is truly lacking the company of his wives and his earlier brothel experience has aroused his sexual desire. If he agrees to her company, he will have to bear with the consequences. But if he rejects her, would she be extremely offended?

Luckily, just as Zhou Wei is beginning to undress him further, footsteps were heard.

Astounded, Xiang Shaolong turned his head and saw Jing Jun. Stunned, he exclaimed, "Little Jun! What is so urgent?"

Jing Jun is still under the impression that Zhou Wei is Zhou Liang's wife and stared at her suspiciously.

Xiang Shaolong instructed Zhou Wei to retreat into her own room and asked again, "What is going on?"

Jing Jun watched Zhou Wei as she left and inquired, "What is she doing here?"

Xiang Shaolong explained their sibling relationship and Jing Jun eyes lit up and sighed, "Third Brother is a blessed man. If she dresses up and apply make-up, her beauty will surpass the Tian sisters."

Xiang Shaolong was inspired and asked Jing Jun to take a seat before smiling, "Is Little Jun interested in her?"

Jing Jun seriously answered, "Third Brother must be kidding. I will not dare to compete with you for her affections."

Xiang Shaolong was pleased, "She is not my woman yet. If you are keen, you can try wooing her. I do not mind at all but instead will be grateful towards you!"

Jing Jun was overjoyed, "Hei! I shall give it a try! I am much better with girls now."

Xiang Shaolong decided, "It is settled then. Why are you not sleeping and came all the way here to look for me?"

Jing Jun enquired, "Can Third Brother participate in an expedition with your injured leg?"

Xiang Shaolong responded, "As long as it is not a fight, I should be fine. What bright ideas do you have?"

Jing Jun whispered, "There is four hours from now till daybreak. If we want to kill Mo Ao, this is the best opportunity."

Xiang Shaolong frowned, "Mo Ao is heavily protected with his own escorts in addition to Lu Buwei's escorts. How can we kill him?"

Jing Jun detailed, "Of course we cannot resort to force. I am familiar with Drunken Wind Brothel's layout and I know the location of the bedrooms of Dan Meimei and Guiyan. If we can slip in and force the pill down Mo Ao's throat, we can turn the tables and wait for him to die an unexplainable death. Wouldn't that be great?"

Xiang Shaolong excitedly cried, "What's the plan?"

Jing Jun opened his palm and displayed a twig that was about three inches long. He proudly proclaimed, "This is a twig from the tree of slumber. When it is lighted, anyone who breathes in the fumes will start to fall asleep. Anyone already asleep will fall into deeper sleep that he will not be awakened even if he is being slapped. Does Third Brother understand now?"

Xiang Shaolong thought it over and agreed, "You better inform Second Brother. If we leave him out of this fun, he will give us a terrible scolding."

With their climbing skills, the three brothers slipped into the Drunken Wind Brothel noiselessly and hid within the vegetation.

Beyond the trees, bright lights can still be seen.

The experienced Jing Jun explained, "There are four chambers in the building within the bamboo clusters ahead. They house the four great beauties of Drunken Wind Brothel who are Dan Meimei, Yang Yu, Guiyan and Bailei. Guiyan's chamber is the left one at the back of the building. Once we can get through the bamboo plants, there is a chance we can

slip inside. If I remember correctly, there are some cinnamon trees near the building which is a good place to hide.”

Teng Yi frowned, “If Lu Buwei is in there too, security will be extra tight. A cluster of bamboo plants is harder to infiltrate compared to normal trees. If there is someone guarding the entrances and exits of the bamboo clusters, how can we slip in?”

Xiang Shaolong asked, “Is there another alternative?”

Jing Jun bitterly smiled, “It is completely surrounded by bamboo and thus, it is named the Secret Bamboo Rendezvous. Once we can pass the obstacle, Mo Ao is as good as dead.”

Footsteps can be heard as two family warriors walked towards them. They seemed to be leading the way with the lanterns they carried and were chatting happily. The three men quietened down and strained their ears to eavesdrop on their conversation.

The first man started, “The four great beauties truly live up to their reputations. Even our Master Guan is tempted and is spending the night in Yang Yu’s room.”

The second man replied, “I heard the last one is Bailei. I wonder if she has an overnight guest. If not, we can have some fun with her.”

The first man sighed, “Can you afford her? I heard that she may not even accompany you even if you have money.”

When they have travelled out of earshot, Xiang Shaolong was inspired and revealed, "Bailei should be accompanying Han Chuang. We can use him to pass through the bamboo clusters."

Before he could finish speaking, a group of people are walking towards them from another building. Han Chuang and Bailei could be seen among them. Teng Yi anxiously exclaimed, "How can we avoid being identified by Bailei?"

This group of people has walked down a garden path and is led by two pretty maids carrying lanterns. Behind the maids are four of Han Chuang's family warriors, followed by the lecherous Han Chuang caressing and hugging Bailei. Behind them are another eight personal escorts.

Witnessing this, Xiang Shaolong was at a loss.

Jing Jun suddenly whispered to Teng Yi, "Bailei does not know who you are!"

Xiang Shaolong had a brainwave, "Second Brother can masquerade as Prince Dan's subordinate. Han Chuang just had a drink with him."

By now, Han Chuang's party has walked past their hiding place and are walking down the straight path leading into the bamboo clusters.

Teng Yi removed his sword and gathered his courage. He rushed out to the path and hailed, "Marquis, please hold your step. Prince Dan has instructed me to pass you a message."



Han Chuang's party stopped walking and the personal escorts revealed a threatening look on their faces.

Teng Yi strode towards him. Although he is unarmed, everyone stared at him with suspicions and their hands are on their sword hilts.

Han Chuang released Bailei from his hold and coldly snorted, "What does Prince Dan wants to say to me?"

Teng Yi knew that Han Chuang's men will not allow him to get close to their master. He stopped walking and bowed, "I am Prince Dan's Right General Long Shan. Has Marquis Han forgotten about me already?"

Long Shan is Teng Yi's fictitious name during their Handan City mission.

Han Chuang was stunned for a while and came to realize the hidden meaning. He laughed, "Yes! Yes! I remember you! General, please forgive me for not recognizing you earlier in the dim environment."

He faced Bailei and ordered, "Please return to your room first. I will join you shortly."

Bailei is not the least suspicious. She reminded Han Chuang to be quick and sauntered off.

Under Han Chuang's cover, the three men disguised as his followers and passed through the heavily-fortified bamboo clusters safely. They arrived at a cinnamon tree which separates Guiyan's chamber from Bailei's chamber.

Han Chuang winked at them and began to climb the stairs.

Two of Bailei's maids stepped forward to entertain them.

Xiang Shaolong, Jing Jun and Teng Yi are afraid to be recognized by the maids. They had made earlier arrangements with the other subordinates of Han Chuang. Two of the escorts hurriedly dragged the two maids into another room and love-making sounds can be heard after a short while.

With the other escorts acting as a lookout, the three men climbed up the cinnamon tree and reached the roof of Guiyan's chamber.

Sounds of snoring can be heard from within.

Jing Jun is the most agile among them. He slipped into the room via a window and Mo Ao's snoring is replaced by sounds of heaving breathing. Xiang Shaolong signalled Teng Yi to stay on the roof while he somersaulted into the room.

Jing Jun was squatting beside the bed and signalled that everything is under control.

Xiang Shaolong was delighted and joined him.

With an oil lamp providing some light, Jing Jun has forced opened Mo Ao's mouth. Xiang Shaolong quickly retrieved the poison pill and used the bronze clippers to insert it into his throat. When the pill is securely stuck in place, they tried to leave but were interrupted by footsteps outside the door.

Xiang Shaolong and Jing Jun were terrified. They stepped over the two sleeping bodies and hid themselves in a dark corner between the bed and the wall.

Heavy knocking is heard and a man shouted from outside, "Master Mo! Premier Lu is looking for you."

Mo Ao and Guiyan naturally did not respond.

Xiang Shaolong knows about the workings of the human anatomy. He pinched Mo Ao heavily at the base of his foot.

Fortunately, Jing Jun did not use a heavy dose of the slumber fumes. Awakened by the sharp pain, Mo Ao was roused from his sleep.

The man shouted again, "Master Mo!"

Mo Ao was in a daze as he just woke up. "What is going on?" He shouted back.

The man replied, "Premier Lu has received urgent news and is waiting downstairs for Master Mo. Ai! Even Master Guan is waiting too."

Xiang Shaolong and Jing Jun were horrified. If Mo Ao notices them, they will be doomed.

Suddenly, Lu Buwei's voice is heard outside the door, "We are waiting for you at the external hall."

Mo Ao shoved Guiyan but she did not respond. He pinched her white breasts for some time before putting on his clothes and casually stepping out of the room.

Xiang Shaolong and Jing Jun were elated. They quickly trailed him and eavesdropped outside the room.

Lu Buwei began, "I just got word that the short-lived Xiang Shaolong went to find Xu Xian and they chatted for two hours before he returned back to the Wu Residence. Hng! Does Mister Mo think they will try any tricks?"

Mo Ao is still under the effects of the slumber fumes and his head is still spinning. He remarked, "I think I drank too much and my head is in pain."

Guan Zhongxie advised, "Brother Mo should drink some tea to calm your nerves."

Sounds of water pouring and drinking can be heard. From the sounds he heard, Xiang Shaolong deduced that only Lu Buwei, Mo Ao and Guan Zhongxie are present.

After some time, Lu Buwei questioned, "Is Mister Mo confident that the poison will act up on the last day of the hunting fair? Without the rebellion of Lord Gaoling, we will be the chief suspect if he dies."

Mo Ao took a deep breath and replied, "Premier Lu can put your mind at ease. I have tried the same poison on several other men and I am confident of the timing."

Guan Zhongxie smiled, "Without Xiang Shaolong, they will be in chaos. We are well-prepared to send the Crown Prince and Empress over the river first. When it is Lu Gong and Xu Xian's turn, we will make the bridge collapse and assassinate

them underwater. It will be a clean job and no one will suspect us.”

Lu Buwei brought up, “I am concerned that Xiang Shaolong and Xu Xian will act first in the first two days. When that happens, we will be at a disadvantage.”

Mo Ao confidently assured, “Relax! As long as they are not sure about Lord Gaoling’s ambush, they will not attack us and make it easy for Lord Gaoling. I doubt they have the guts anyway.”

Lu Buwei sighed, “The Crown Prince is another issue. He still does not know he is my own flesh and blood. Ai! It is all because of that bitch Zhu Ji. I have told her numerous times to clarify this with him but she flatly refuses. She is also unwilling to make me the Regent of Qin. Hng! Lao Ai is such a useless bum.”

Guan Zhongxie suggested, “I think Xiang Shaolong is the main reason that Empress does not fully submit to Premier.”

Mo Ao sniggered, “I have a secret plan to make her happy and make you the Regent at the same time.”

The two eavesdroppers Xiang Shaolong and Jing Jun were excited and curious to know about his plan. At the same time, they have to admire Mo Ao’s quick thinking.

Lu Buwei was pleased and asked for the details.

Mo Ao smiled, “You must let Empress feel that you and Xiang Shaolong are no longer enemies to make her submit fully to you.”

Guan Zhongxie was slightly irritated, "Is Brother Mo suggesting that we let Lu Niangrong marry him!"

Mo Ao smiled, "Don't tell me Brother Guan is jealous of a man with only three days left to live!"

Mo Ao explained in a low voice, "Premier Lu can invite Empress to announce the wedding plans for Third Mistress and Xiang Shaolong. At the same time, to promote Premier to Regent. When these two matters are carried out together, it indicates that if Empress allows Premier to be promoted, Premier will sacrifice his favourite daughter to guarantee the safety of Xiang Shaolong. In these circumstances, Empress will relent in order to protect Xiang Shaolong. Of course, Lao Ai needs to put in some effort too."

Xiang Shaolong has no idea what is the difference between a Regent and a Prime Minister but it should be a post of authority that will slowly diminish Xiao Pan's right of rule.

Guan Zhongxie did not object any further.

Lu Buwei cheered, "This is a brilliant plan. Zhongxie! I have to bother you to persuade Niangrong! She only listens to you. When she pretended to kick up a fuss as you instructed, even Xiang Shaolong was fooled."

Xiang Shaolong realised that Lu Niangrong's tantrum and marriage rejection was all a ploy and could not help but feel extremely hateful.

Since she is such a vicious woman, he need not show her any mercy or pity in the future.

As Jing Jun suggested, he should toy with her and it is as good as delivering a blow to Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie.

Lu Buwei concluded, "So it shall be decided then. The sky is brightening soon!"

Xiang Shaolong and Jing Jun dared not loiter any further and slipped away in the blink of an eye.

Under such unexpected circumstances, they actually managed to gather such crucial intelligence. Now, the game will be played differently.

## CHAPTER 3

## The Great Hunting Fair

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BEFORE dawn, an exhausted Han Chuang had to drag his tired body out of bed to escort Xiang Shaolong and his brothers to leave the brothel safely.

When they reached the streets, they parted immediately to avoid suspicions.

Back at the Wu Residence, the sky is beginning to brighten. The three men hurriedly changed their clothes and while Teng Yi and Jing Jun set off to the Command Centre to see to the hunting fair, Xiang Shaolong made his way to the palace.



He ran into Xu Xian's convoy and was invited to join him in the horse carriage. Lu Gong is in the carriage too and they were discussing on how to counter Lu Buwei's schemes. Although they are fully dressed in hunting clothes, they do not seem enthusiastic about the hunting fair at all.

Lu Gong noticed that his eyes are red because he did not sleep a wink last night. He nodded, "It must be hard on you."

Xiang Shaolong was glad, "My body may be tired but I am in a great mood."

Xu Xian was stunned, "Shaolong has such a confident expression. Have there been any new developments?"

Xiang Shaolong lowered his voice and revealed his two adventures to Drunken Wind Brothel, including the eavesdropping of Lu Buwei's secret meeting.

Both listeners cheered at his accomplishment.

Lu Gong slapped his thigh with delight and cried, "Even the poison pill can be extracted from Shaolong's throat. This shows that Heaven is on our side."

Xu Xian decided, "Since this is the case, we shall adhere to Shaolong's suggestion and use Lao Ai against Lu Buwei. Actually, Lu Buwei is quite a good administrator. Let's give him a few years of peace. When our Crown Prince is coroneted, that will be the end of him."

Lu Gong agreed, "In the meantime, we will hold on to our military authority and cultivate good leaders. When it is time to act, we will be more than prepared."

Xiang Shaolong suggested, "I have a good man to recommend and it is none other than Wang Jian..."

Xu Xian laughed and interrupted him, "Thanks for your reminder and in fact, we have noticed him as a potential leader as well. Let's give him more time to fine tune his skills! Ai! Wang Chi is getting senile and it will soon be time for his son to succeed him."

Lu Gong is now in a good mood and laughed, "Is Shaolong ready to marry Lu Niangrong while annoying Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled back, "I think this will in return give them a big headache."

Xu Xian mused, "But as the Regent of Qin, his authority will be beyond question and he will be like the acting King. Without his approval, no royal order can be issued."

Xiang Shaolong reminded, "Does Premier Xu recall my suggestion about the Premier Mentor? We can use this official post to humour Lu Buwei first. When Mo Ao dies three days later, he will be at a loss. By that time, Lao Ai will be promoted to be the Inner Custodian and it will be too late for Lu Buwei to object."

By now, the convoy is entering the palace and all the three men are in great spirits. They cannot wait for the three days to quickly pass and witness the retribution of these evil men.

Xiang Shaolong's anxious mind has been replaced by a new relaxing mood. Amazing!

In the next few days, he will amuse himself with these evil men and even Lu Dan'er and Ying Ying will not be let off. After all, what is life without some fun!

The palace courtyard is filled with men and horses assembled for the hunting fair.

The participating hunters are either from the royal family, high ranking officials or the representatives of various departments. Everyone is dressed in light hunting clothes and mounted on their horses under their respective banners. Altogether, it was an impressive display of five thousand gallant men and stunning beauties.

Ten thousand Palace guards are protecting the Imperial Convoy on both sides as they prepared to move to the hunting grounds.

Lord Changping, Lord Changwen and Guan Zhongxie are fully occupied with managing the deployment of their men as well as maintaining law and order.

Xiang Shaolong left the carriage and mounted Jifeng. Leading his Eighteen Guardians leisurely, he soaked himself in the festive atmosphere.

One of the banners is embroidered with the word 'Qi' which reminded Xiang Shaolong of 'his old friend' Tian Dan. He was amused as Lu Buwei would have told Tian Dan about his impending death. Thus, Tian Dan would be delighted and complacent, making it easier for Xiang Shaolong to assassinate him.

Xu Xian, Lu Buwei, Lu Gong and the other high ranking officials are lined up in two rows in front of the inspection platform. Guests like Tian Dan and Prince Dan are based further away. Han Chuang is apparently absent and he must have returned home to Han.

The most outstanding are the Female Warriors led by Ying Ying. Over a hundred young ladies dressed elaborately in their hunting outfits stood out from the crowd of mostly men. They bantered noisily with the young men besides them and added some liveliness to the situation.

However, the group that gained everyone's attention are his own wives and Qin Qing. They did not have any banner but just stood on one side under the protection of their family warriors. Everyone near and far strained their eyes and their necks to catch a glimpse of their beauty.

Ji Yanran and Qin Qing are beyond comparison; Wu Tingfang and Zhao Zhi are rare beauties themselves and the loving twin sisters Tian Zhen and Tian Feng only cause everyone to be intoxicated with their charm and elegance.

Xiang Shaolong could not resist and rode up to them, smiling, "Which department do you girls represent?"

All the girls giggled with pleasure.

Qin Qing coldly state, "Empress has specially instructed us to accompany her for the next three days for the hunt. I think we belong to her department."

From her cold expression, Xiang Shaolong deduced that she must be bearing grudges at him for taking advantage of her and is now viewing him with suspicions. Sighing secretly, he smiled weakly and did not reply. Facing Wu Tingfang and Zhao Zhi, he questioned, "Where is Bao'er?"

Wu Tingfang is so excited that her face is totally red. She cooed, "I wanted to bring him to the hunt but is concerned that he may catch a cold. I have left with at the Qin Residence under the care of the nanny."

Zhao Zhi exclaimed, "Hubby! Shall I introduce you to our two new nannies?"

Behind her, the Tian sisters' faces begin to burn like fire. Embarrassed, they were did not know where to hide when Wu Tingfang whispered, "Hubby! Can you come to our tent tonight? We missed you greatly!"

Xiang Shaolong was tempted at her offer and hurriedly agreed.

Sounds of drumbeats can be heard as Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji ascended the inspection platform under the escort of the palace guards.

Everyone paid their respects and proclaimed their loyalty to them.

The hunting fair has finally begun!

The hunting teams stretched out over ten miles and it was a grand display of power.

The cavalry army is standing guard at the boundaries of the hunting grounds and security is extremely tight.

To show off the might of Qin, Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji rode on a horse each towards the hunting grounds. They were accompanied by Lu Buwei, Xu Xian, Lu Gong, Wang Wan, Cai Ze, other important officials as well as the palace guards.

Xiang Shaolong was riding with Wu Tingfang and his wives when Li Si trailed behind the main group and came to find him. They left the official roads and rode on the byways.

Li Si whispered, "Whenever I saw Grand Tutor Qin, I always feel that she is more enthralling than Talented Lady Ji; but whenever I saw Talented Lady Ji, I feel that Qin Qing is inferior to her. Now that I have seen both of them side by side, I finally understood that they are both without equal and are attractive in their own ways."

Xiang Shaolong observed, "Brother Li is in great spirits today!"

Li Si shook his head, "I am appearing joyful despite my difficulties! The hunting fair is fraught with dangers and how can I be happy?"

Carefully assessing Xiang Shaolong's expression, he continued, "Brother Xiang must have a terrible night's sleep. Your eyes are bloodshot and your voice is hoarse. I am worried for you."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "I did not even sleep; so how can my sleep be bad? Regarding my throat, it was scrapped. If not for this throat injury, I may be dead."

He proceeded to divulge everything that that has transpired last night.

Li Si was totally blown away and excitedly exclaimed, "I must report this to the Crown Prince. Ai! I am more and more impressed with Brother Xiang's abilities."

He added, "No wonder Lu Buwei had earlier suggested marrying his daughter to Brother Xiang and petitioned Empress and Crown Prince to represent his wishes. Empress is naturally delighted but Crown Prince and I were puzzled. So this is the real motive behind his intention. Hei! Is Brother Xiang going to reject his marriage proposal?"

Xiang Shaolong returned his question with his own question, "Do you think I will?"

Both men looked at each other and broke out into laughter.

Li Si remarked, "It is a Qin custom to announce important policies or promote officials during the hunting fair. Brother Xiang's suggestion to make Lu Buwei the Premier Mentor is a wonderful suggestion. It will keep him guessing and curb his ambitions. The Crown Prince will use this idea if the Empress tries to force him to promote Lu Buwei again."

Xiang Shaolong noticed Guan Zhongxie riding towards them from the corner of his eye and hurriedly changed the topic to some irrelevant issues.

Guan Zhongxie may be up the whole night but he is much more rejuvenated than Xiang Shaolong and approached them energetically. He greeted Li Si, "Since Official Li has entered the palace to serve the Crown Prince, we did not have much time to catch up. We should spend more time together during these three days."

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization. He realised that Lu Buwei may even try to replace Li Si with Mo Ao to fully control Xiao Pan. Li Si must be the next person on Lu Buwei's hit list. Why didn't he think of this earlier?

At the end of the day, he lacked a clever advisor like Mo Ao or Li Si to assist him.

Li Si is the best candidate but he needs to focus on helping Xiao Pan and cannot be available to him. He recalled that he had Ji Yanran and cursed himself for not making use of his clever wife's intelligence.

Guan Zhongxie's voice sounded out beside him, "Why is Official Xiang so melancholic?"

Xiang Shaolong decided to play a trick on him and winked at Li Si, saying, "Can I have a private word with you?"

Li Si understood his intention and bade farewell. He rode ahead and rejoined the main group.

Guan Zhongxie was startled, "What does Official Xiang want to tell me?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Official Li told me earlier that Premier Lu has the intention to marry Third Mistress to me



and it may be announced tomorrow. Honestly speaking, I know that Third Mistress is in love with Brother Guan instead! No matter where we stand, I am full of admiration for Brother Guan's character and sword skills. Even if we are on opposing sides, this is a love matter and not a manly fight. As long as you say the word, I will speak to Empress and Crown Prince immediately and not spoil Third Mistress's chastity."

Guan Zhongxie's eyes were originally shining sharply but after hearing his words, his expression became mixed.

Xiang Shaolong was impressed. Guan Zhongxie could easily deny everything and no one will be the wiser. But this will also indicate that he is a cowardly liar.

Given the unique circumstances, no one else can understand their awkward positions.

In actual fact, they are out to kill each other but are doing it secretly.

In the eyes of Guan Zhongxie, Xiang Shaolong is nearly a dead man who still thinks he escaped the poisoning. With his upfront attitude, he is obviously not out to take advantage of Lu Niangrong. From this, it shows that Xiang Shaolong is an honourable man who will not take revenge for the poisoning by seducing Lu Niangrong. He was a true gentleman.

Xiang Shaolong is secretly laughing and patiently waited for his response.

Guan Zhongxie suddenly smiled bitterly, "I will not lie to you but Third Mistress's marriage is something beyond my control and I should not come between two of you. In life, you win some and you lose some. That's a fact. Third Mistress is no longer young but is still a wilful girl. I am sure you can still be a good and fitting husband. Official Xiang should not worry about this anymore." Finishing, he rode off.

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. Tu Xian is right about Guan Zhongxie being an asshole. Even to a dying man, he is still faking his words. What a despicable cad!

But this is what he expected. When he did not die three days later, Lu Nianrong will become his fiancé and it is due to Guan Zhongxie's own arrangement. This will cause him great regrets and deal a blow to his pride.

In the past, he seduced Wu Tingfang and Zhao Ya from Lian Jin, making him lose his rationality and cause him to be defeated by himself.

Coincidentally, the same scenario is repeated on Guan Zhongxie.

What will he do when he loses his rationality?

Thinking about this, he quickly caught up to Ji Yanran and wanted to consult her.

Qin Qing, Ji Yanran and the other girls are travelling with Empress Zhu Ji and were chatting happily. Xiao Pan, Lu Buwei and the rest are travelling in front of them.

Xiang Shaolong is afraid to see Zhu Ji and stayed at the back, trying to find an opportunity to isolate Yanran.

Someone shouted, "Official Xiang!"

Xiang Shaolong turned his head around and saw Lao Ai leaving his group and riding towards him. He greeted him respectfully when he reached his side.

Xiang Shaolong returned his greetings and praised, "Official Lao is looking great! Life must be good in the palace."

Lao Ai lowered his voice, "It is all thanks to Official Xiang's recommendation. Even the Crown Prince said the same."

He happily added, "During the hunting fair, the Crown Prince will officially promote me to be the Inner Custodian. Soon, we will have plenty of opportunities to work together!"

Xiang Shaolong can feel that his thanks are sincere. For Lao Ai, he will be grateful to whoever that can bring him more wealth and authority. He used to obey Lu Buwei as he is looking for employment. Now, this unscrupulous and selfish man will forsake Lu Buwei for greater benefits.

Xiang Shaolong inquired in a low voice, "Does Premier Lu know about this?"

Lao Ai angrily swore, "He only knew about it yesterday and threw his temper at Empress. Fortunately, Empress rebutted him."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be surprised, "Brother Lao is being promoted and enjoying a life of luxury. He should be happy for you but why is he opposing instead?"

Lao Ai viciously hissed, "He naturally will not say that he opposes my promotion but he insisted that I am a criminal and should not be promoted or tongues will wag. Hei! Ultimately, he wants to keep me as a lowly servant forever."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad that Lao Ai and Lu Buwei are now openly on opposing sides. He officially state, "Brother Lao can put your mind at ease. I have spoken to Premier Xu and Lieutenant General Lu. They will support Brother Lao for sure."

Lao Ai was flabbergasted, "Hei! This... This..." He was speechless.

Xiang Shaolong tried to control his laughter and strongly affirmed, "Lu Buwei is a basterd. The higher your rank, the more jealous he is of you. But Brother Lao can relax. As long as I am in his way, you will be safe."

Lao Ai trembled and his expression grew serious.

At this, Tian Zhen noticed him and slowed down to join him.

Xiang Shaolong patted Lao Ai's shoulder and rode ahead to join her.

The battle of Lao Ai and Lu Buwei is about to begin!

## CHAPTER 4

## The Incredible Talented Lady Ji

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

AN ENDLESS sea of tents and flags can be seen west of the River Jing.

Xiang Shaolong, Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang, Zhao Zhi and the Tian sisters are situated on a little hill near the royal tent. They were observing all the excitement happening below them.

It may not be a real battle but the military movements are precise and according to the military law.

Among the seven states, Qin has the heaviest emphasis on military contributions. Every young child would have learnt some form of martial arts and everyone is somewhat familiar with military formations.

Since the terrain is wide grassland with no cover, a square campsite has been laid out.

Xiao Pan's tent is situated in the centre of the defending gates and is akin to a military command centre. Within the gates are about twenty tents which belong to the royal family and others like Qin Qing who share a special relationship with the rulers of Qin.

On the two sides of the defending gates are two defending armies of palace guards led by Lord Changping and Lord Changwen respectively. Xiao Pan has direct control over the army to safeguard his own safety.

The other soldiers are based in all four directions and act as defenders. Xiang Shaolong's cavalry army is based far away and is protecting the entire camp from their location. If necessary, they can act as a vanguard or a distraction to a potential enemy.

Besides the main tents, the other tents are in groups of ten and the space between them is wide enough for eight horses to travel side by side.

There are some dedicated areas with stables and target boards for hunters to practise their shooting skills, riding skills and even sword skills. These areas are especially crowded like a festive parade.

It is now four hours away from the evening hunt and everyone is enthusiastically assembled at the main assembly ground and challenging one another.

The main assembly ground near the royal tent has become the playground for Ying Ying and her female warriors. Young men keen to woo these stubborn Qin ladies are all gathering around the area for their chance to interact with them. Thus, this area is much livelier than the others.

Sounds of horses braying and people talking filled the air.

The strong wind began to blow and the flags unfurled majestically, adding to the grandeur of the hunting fair.

Ji Yanran has been updated on everything that has happened and smiled, "When Lord Gaoling is about to attack, he will first set fire to the tents furthest away from the royal tents and the river. Since it is now blowing the southeast wind, the fire will spread towards us and we can only escape by crossing the river and hiding at the north shore of River Jing."

Xiang Shaolong and the ladies turned their attention to the two wooden bridges and were shocked. If the two bridges are destroyed, the consequences will be unimaginable.

Even if the two bridges are intact, they cannot support some many people crossing. Those who are unable to cross the bridge will have to swim over. During the chaos, it will be an easy feat for Lu Buwei to carry out his assassination.

He recalled that Guan Zhongxie will 'heroically' escort Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan across the river to safety while he will 'die of poisoning' and Guan Zhongxie will 'score a huge merit'. Mo Ao's devious scheme is indeed a brilliant strategy.

Rainfall is scarce and a fire attack is hard to prevent. Moreover, Lord Gaoling is familiar with the tents and in fact, his own tent is located at the southeast part of the campsite. He can easily set fire as Ji Yanran predicted.

In addition, during the night hunt, every hunter would be busy in the west forests and their defences will be lacking. That would be the ideal time to ambush the Crown Prince and Zhu Ji.

If the Lord Changping brothers are killed in battle, it is possible that Lu Buwei can insert his own subordinates to replace them as head of the palace guards.

Xiang Shaolong took a deep breath and remarked, "Yanran is amazing and can predict Lord Gaoling's ambush like a fortune teller. Therefore, we must pay close attention to the southeast tents. The moment Lord Gaoling's men or Lu Buwei's men tried to bring flammable materials to that area, we will know when they will strike."

Ji Yanran was overjoyed at his praise and smiled sweetly back at him.

Hoof beats can be heard as Lord Changwen rode up to him and cried, "Let's ride our horses to the assembly ground to join in the fun!"



The ladies turned around to face him and he jealously stared at Ji Yanran and the girls with an intoxicated look on his face. He sighed, "Good evening ladies. Ai! I am so envious of Shaolong's good fortune."

Wu Tingfang chortled and smiled prettily, asking, "Has Lord Changwen finished his duties?"

Lord Changwen put on a busy expression and reported, "Empress and Crown Prince have settled down and Grand Tutor Qin is chatting with the Empress now. I was ordered to inform you ladies about this."

Xiang Shaolong yawned, "You go ahead and have fun! I wished to catch some sleep in my tent."

Lord Changwen burst out laughing and rode ahead between Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran. As he rode past Xiang Shaolong, he grabbed onto his horse's reins and dragged him down the slope, shouting to the ladies, "We are going to have some fun!"

The ladies saw Xiang Shaolong helplessly being dragged down the hill and giggled with laughter. They then chased them down the slope.

Sou! Three arrows were shot out in succession and all three hit the bull's eye of a target three hundred feet away. The observers cheered and clapped loudly.

The archer Ying Ying proudly scanned her audience and cried, "Who else is next?"

The various men may be itching to try but with this beauty challenging them, they are afraid to lose face if they failed to better her record. For some time, no one dared to accept her challenge.

Guan Zhongxie laughed, "Our best shooter among the female warriors is invincible. Of course no one dares to accept her challenge."

Ying Ying was delighted at his praise and shot him a lovely glance. The other men were jealous but still did not have the courage to give it a try.

Xiang Shaolong dismounted from his horse and was stunned at Ying Ying's archery skills. He can hit the bull's eye with one arrow but definitely not with three arrows in succession. No wonder Ying Ying is so arrogant.

When the female warriors noticed Xiang Shaolong, every one of them had a look of displeasure on their faces but when they saw Ji Yanran, their expressions became envious.

Lu Dan'er stepped out from the crowd and jeered, "Has Commander Xiang recovered from his leg injury? I heard that you are unbeatable in parrying arrows with your sword but I wonder how good are your archery skills?"

Nearly a thousand pair of eyes looked at Xiang Shaolong before shifting over to Ji Yanran.

Ji Yanran naturally knew the level her husband's archery skill and recognizes that the people of Qin values martial talent. If Xiang Shaolong refuses to participate because of his injury,

he will be ridiculed by the people of Qin. Grinning, she took off her cloak and revealed a figure-hugging white suit. She gracefully stepped forward and asked in her sweet voice, "Can I give it a try?"

Her casual demeanour and alluring disposition caused everyone present to be mesmerized by her.

When she finished speaking, everyone cheered at her decision and her attractive and athletic display.

Ying Ying shot a vicious look at Ji Yanran before she reluctantly stretched out to pass her the bow.

Ji Yanran noticed that Ying Ying is standing using the horse stance and guessed that she wanted to play a trick on her. Out of a sudden, she grabbed onto the end of the bow and applied downward pressure. Before Ying Ying could retaliate, the bow has been pried from her hands into the hands of the maiden who is even prettier than herself.

Even Guan Zhongxie was taken aback.

Standing besides Xiang Shaolong, Lord Changwen whispered, "It is good to curb that arrogant sister of mine!"

Ying Ying did not anticipate Ji Yanran to see through her trick and dejectedly returned to Lu Dan'er's side.

Two cavalry soldiers happily stepped forward and presented three arrows to Ji Yanran.

Ji Yanran pretended that everything is the same and leisurely fitted the arrows to her bow while maintaining that sweet smile on her face.

The crowd quietened down.

In a whirl of actions, Ji Yanran fired three arrows one after another while the crowd stared with their mouths wide open. Her arrows shot forward like shooting stars.

She fired her first arrow with her back to the target board and her second arrow with a backhand. It was only until the final arrow did she face the target board properly.

Zng! The first arrow hit the bull's eye while the second arrow split the first arrow into two and the final arrow split the second arrow into two. It was as if she is the Goddess of Archery. No one could believe their eyes. Without question, her archery skill is way above Ying Ying's.

The crowd burst out into wild cheering which lasted for some time.

Ji Yanran is furious at Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er for 'bullying' her husband and did not even spare them a single glance. She curtseyed to the crowd and left without a word.

Xiang Shaolong can tell that their 'hatred' is becoming more intense.

An escort came to report that the Crown Prince is looking for him.

As he crossed past the wooden defending gates, he noticed a group of female warriors are riding behind him. Taking a closer look, he realised that it is Lu Niangrong and her female escorts.

When Lu Niangrong saw him, she has a mixed expression on her face. She curled up her mouth proudly and whipped her horse, cruising past Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong detests her.

Knowing that he is poisoned, she did not show the slightest pity. Like father, like daughter. She is an evil woman just like her father Lu Buwei.

Hng!

She will get her just deserts later.

The open space in front of the main royal tent is filled with loud cheering. It appears that Xiao Pan is practicing his archery while Lu Buwei, Xu Xian, Lu Gong, Lord Changping and the other officials are cheering him on.

Li Si caught sight of him and moved to welcome him. "It is time!" he whispered.

Xiang Shaolong knew that Li Si is referring to the blood test. From Li Si's anxious expression, Xiang Shaolong is certain that he is worried about the test results. If Xiao Pan is Lu Buwei's son, it would be disastrous.

Xiang Shaolong squeezed to where Lu Gong and Xu Xian were standing and took out the special needle while winking at them.

Both men started to breathe heavily.

Xiao Pan has shot ten arrows with four hitting the bull's eye and the remaining near the bull's eyes. This has surpassed his usual record and no wonder the officials are so happy for him. As long as he manages to hit the target board, it is enough to make the crowd go wild.

As Wang Ben delivered another arrow to him, Xiao Pan detected Xiang Shaolong among the crowd. He turned over and raised his bow, exclaiming happily, "Grand Tutor! My archery skill has improved!"

Xiang Shaolong is certain that he is providing an opportunity for him to draw his blood. He greeted him and advised, "If Crown Prince uses less of his eyes and more of his hands, your results will improve dramatically."

Xiao Pan was surprised, "Archery is all about eyesight. What is the hand used for?"

Everyone including Xiao Pan was puzzled at his words and he became the centre of attention.

Standing besides Lu Buwei, Lu Nianrong and Mo Ao were staring viciously at him.

Xiang Shaolong respectfully got Xiao Pan to turn around and while he is turning around, he lightly poked the special needle at his neck. As Xiao Pan is exercising, his blood

circulation is very strong and the needle was filled immediately.

Behind him, Xu Xian, Lu Gong and Lord Changping witnessed everything but the act was hidden from the eyes of everyone else.

Xiao Pan yelped, “Ai!” He went to touch his neck and purposely cried, “There is a mosquito!”

Xiang Shaolong stuffed the needle into Xu Xian’s hands and advised, “The Crown Prince must focus on the synergy between the eyes and the hands when shooting an arrow. However, it is easier to aim with the hand than the eyes. When the eye sees the target, it informs the heart and the heart will instruct the hand to shoot. This is quite cumbersome. If the hand is used directly to aim at the target, you will not have this issue. Look!”

He simply drew out five flying needles and shot them towards the two hundred feet target board.

Nobody expected that he would be shooting flying needles instead of arrows and were stunned. The five flying needles hit the target board neatly in a straight row and the centre needle hit the centre of the bull’s eye. The distance between each needle is exactly one inch. It was a result that even Xiang Shaolong did not anticipate.

His flying needles may be famous but no one has actually seen it in action.

Witnessing his accuracy on a two hundred feet target board, everyone agrees that he has a frightening and special way of throwing the needles with such deafening results. Lu Buwei, Lu Niangrong and Mo Ao have a horrified expression on their faces.

Everyone present clapped and cheered loudly at his excellent display of talent.

Lu Buwei and Mo Ao exchanged a smile, thinking that Xiang Shaolong would be dead in a matter of days despite his godly ability.

Wang Ben ecstatically wanted to retrieve the flying needles and return them to Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Pan stopped him. He instructed, "Leave the needles on the target board. I want to keep this as a souvenir. Let the target board stay like that for the next three days."

Xiao Pan was full of admiration, "I finally comprehend the essence of Grand Tutor's terrifying flying needles. They were thrown with the hand rather than with the eyes."

Xiang Shaolong may have been promoted to be the Imperial Cavalry Commander but he is still holding the post as a Grand Tutor so that he may still impart lessons to Xiao Pan the Crown Prince.

Xiang Shaolong secretly assessed Lu Buwei, Mo Ao and Lu Niangrong's expressions. He noticed that Lu Niangrong has a lingering fear in her eyes which is probably caused by his excellent shot. Frankly speaking, he has no confidence of repeating this feat.



During his usual practise, he was using his eyes to aim at the target. Only today did he really use his hands to aim at the target board.

Lu Gong praised, "I am afraid no one can match Shaolong's flying needles skill in the past, the present or in the future."

Lu Buwei laughed, "Rong'er! Now, you have seen Official Xiang's true abilities."

Lu Niangrong lowered her face to prevent others from detecting the dilemma expression on her face. Xiao Pan took this chance to invite, "Grand Tutor, please have a chat with me in my tent!"

With Li Si in tow, they walked towards the main royal tent.

Before Xiang Shaolong could take a step, Lu Gong whispered, "After you have seen the Crown Prince, come to my tent immediately." He winked at him with a knowing expression.

Xiang Shaolong could not understand how he managed to draw Lu Buwei's blood or that he has something else to discuss with him. With this concern, he proceeded to the main royal tent. Within the tent, Xiao Pan sighed, "Grand Tutor must teach me how to shoot the flying needles the way you did."

Li Si praised, "No wonder Official Xiang has always been able to escape precarious situations and live another day to tell the tale. These flying needles are virtually undetectable when they are being shot and there is no way to parry them with a sword."

Xiang Shaolong sat down on a thick carpet and bitterly smiled, "The Crown Prince and Official Li need not praise me to the skies. Last night, I made an about-turn at the gates of hell. That is what I call pure luck."

Under Xiao Pan questioning, Xiang Shaolong revealed everything that has happened last night.

When Xiao Pan learned about Lord Gaoling's rebellion and Lu Buwei's scheming, he angrily swore, "These two men are atrocious! Do they still regard me as their King?"

Li Si hurriedly assured, "Please do not be angry. Official Xiang has plans to counter them."

Xiao Pan looked over to Xiang Shaolong and Xiang Shaolong nodded, "When we know the time that Lord Gaoling is attacking the camp, we can use our army to wipe him out. Here, I wished that Crown Prince will lead the army personally. First, we can destroy Lord Gaoling's forces and secondly, we can counter Lu Buwei's schemes. In the future, no one will dare to challenge your authority."

These words are what Xiao Pan wanted to hear. This future Qin Shihuang loved to affirm his authority and he nodded, "Since Official Xiang is so confident, we shall act according to your plans."

Xiang Shaolong explained, "This matter will require precise intelligence and acting according to circumstances. I will keep in contact with Official Li. When I have gathered the appropriate information, I will report to Crown Prince." He secretly winked at Xiao Pan.

Xiao Pan understood his meaning. Xiang Shaolong will prepare the army orders while he himself will execute them accordingly. Elated, his face became reddish and he nodded, "We will follow your advice!"

He continued, "Today, Empress told me that Lu Buwei wanted to marry his beloved third daughter to you. I thought Lu Buwei has a change of heart but it is all part of a trick. Ha! Mo Ao will die an unexplainable death. I am so happy."

Li Si and Xiang Shaolong heard his words and knew that he is in great spirits. They did not hold back and joined him in laughter.

An attendant came to report that Lao Ai is here to report something. The three men immediately stopped laughing. Lao Ai came in and knelt down, requesting, "The Empress wishes to see Crown Prince."

With a scornful look, Xiao Pan replied, "I got it! Please return first. I will join you shortly."

When Lao Ai has left the tent, Xiao Pan lowered his voice and asked, "Is Official Xiang ready to marry Lu Buwei's precious daughter?"

Xiang Shaolong coldly smiled, "When Lu Buwei saw me still well and alive, he will try to annul the marriage. But that is his problem!"

Xiao Pan understood his meaning and nodded, "I know what to do!" And stood up.

Xiang Shaolong and Li Si hurriedly knelt down in respect.

Xiao Pan went forward and helped Xiang Shaolong up, whispering into his ear, "Master, please be careful. If anything happens to you, the world will be meaningless."

He turned around and left.

## CHAPTER 5

## A Heartless Man Indeed

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

A DROP of Xiao Pan's blood trickled out of the special needle and dripped into the bowl of special chemical.

Xu Xian retrieved another special needle filled with Lu Buwei's blood and brought it to the edge of the bowl but did not release the blood immediately.

Everyone was staring at Xiao Pan's drop of blood with excitement.

Inside Lu Gong's tent, there are ten over military leaders which are all important position holders. Except for Lu Gong and Xu Xian, there is Wang He, Jia Gongcheng, Lord Yunyang Ying Ao and Lord Yiqu Ying Lou. It appears that Xiao Pan's relationship with Lu Buwei is of utmost importance to them.

Xiang Shaolong was squeezed in the middle of all these generals and he inquired, "How did you manage to get Lu Buwei's blood?"

Lord Yunyang Ying Ao replied, "I dragged him out for archery while Lu Gong and Wang He were jostling with him. Thus, we took his blood without his knowledge."

Lu Gong is not interested in their casual talk and called, "Xu Xian!"

Xu Xian hardened his resolve and poured the second drop of blood into the bowl of chemical.

The crowd became as silent as a dormouse and everyone has a choked feeling. For an instant, everyone held their breaths.

The drop of blood entered the chemical and swirled to for a while before it came into contact with Xiao Pan's drop of blood.

Amazingly, the two drops of blood separated immediately like the two different magnet poles repelling each other.

The tent was filled with mad cheering.

Xiang Shaolong sighed with relief.

Knowing the future can be a burden. Even though he is certain that Xiao Pan will pass the blood test, he cannot help but be worried like everyone else.

Back in his own tent, Ji Yanran and the other girls are carefully cleaning Xiang Shaolong's wound and applying fresh medicine. Teng Yi came back from his duties and sat down, reporting, "We have located Lord Gaoling's men!"

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed, "Where are they?"

Teng Yi is in a great mood and retrieved a map from his bosom, smiling, "The Qin hunting fair is child's play in front of a seasoned hunter like me. If I hunt personally, all the tigers and wolves would be frightened off."

Xiang Shaolong assisted him in spreading the map and laughed, "Second Brother should have told me earlier. Then, I would prepare a large quantity of tiger ears for sale at ten times the original price. I guarantee that the amateur hunters will not go back empty handed and I can even make a ton of money."

Ji Yanran and the girls instantly broke out in laughter and giggles.

Teng Yi laughed, "Amateur hunters! That is a unique description."

Xiang Shaolong enquired, "Where is the cave that Lord Gaoling's men are hiding in?"

Teng Yi was stunned, "How did you know that?"

Pointing to a group of mountains fifty miles from the campsite, he detailed, "This area has dense forests and is located at the upstream of River Jing. There are seven caves situated there which the locals have named the 'Seven Connected Caves'. Lord Gaoling has planned their hiding spot well. Although we know that they are hiding there, it is impossible to locate their exact location. There is no way we can determine the size of their forces."

Wu Tingfang innocently suggested, "Second Brother is exaggerating. Why don't you surround the forest and set it on fire? I am sure they will be forced out by the burning."

Xiang Shaolong loved her innocent and silly demeanour and smiled, "The forest is wet with the Spring dew. It is impossible to burn a forest. Ao!"

He caught hold of Wu Tingfang's incoming fist but did not relent, "Unless we use the super fire that comes from the mouth of Wu's First Mistress."

Ji Yanran mocked, "Since our hubby came back from the jaws of death, he has become cheekier."

Zhao Zhi clamoured over to help Wu Tingfang withdraw her fist from Xiang Shaolong's grasp.

As Teng Yi took a closer look at Xiang Shaolong's injury, he added, "But the moment they left the seven caves, they will not escape the detection of our Jing Village hunters. Hei! I think we should use our own men and allow them to gain more battle experience."



Xiang Shaolong clapped Teng Yi's shoulder and agreed, "We shall do as Second Brother advised. Fortunately, Du Bi is not in Xianyang City or things could be more complicated. Hee! In Lu Buwei's eyes, I am someone due to die in two days. No matter what I do in these two days, he will just bear with me and even pretend to support me so as to allay the suspicions of others. Most crucially, he must put on a fine act in front of Zhu Ji. Thus, I must find some things to do so as to give justice to Mo Ao's brilliant scheming."

Zhao Zhi is bandaging his wound with Ji Yanran. When she heard this, she whined, "Before your leg has recovered, we will not allow you to participate in any fighting."

Xiang Shaolong feigned surprise, "Who said that I am going to fight with someone?"

Ji Yanran smiled, "Sister Zhi, he is teasing you! Attack him now and see if he will retaliate or not."

In the midst of their fun, the tent attendant reported, "Grand Tutor Qin is here!"

As the image of Qin Qing surfaced in his memory, he came to realise that everyone is so happy today because they have finally succeeded in countering Mo Ao. The presence of this man is a threat to their well-being.

Ever since he delivered the poison pill back to his throat, they have become more relaxed and even the usually serious Teng Yi is more jovial now.

But they must still keep their guard up. As long as Mo Ao is still alive, they must be careful and not allow the enemy to see through them.

The Tian sisters have just finished tidying up Xiang Shaolong's clothes when Qin Qing entered the tent with a heavy expression on her face.

After all his encounters with her, this is the first time she came to Xiang Shaolong's 'territory'. He had a strange feeling inside him. But eyeing her serious expression, he felt that something is amiss.

Wu Tingfang welcomed, "Sister Qin should have come earlier. We were having a big showdown!"

Ji Yanran noticed her expression too and frowned, "What is bothering Sister Qin?"

Teng Yi greeted Qin Qing and took the chance to take his leave.

Qin Qing sat down opposite Ji Yanran and gently replied, "I need to speak to your husband privately."

The girls were slightly startled but Yanran firmly stood up and state, "We have to cross the river soon. We will be waiting for both of you outside."

Xiang Shaolong glanced at Qin Qing with astonishment and asked, "Why is Grand Tutor Qin so upset?"

Qin Qing stared at him coldly and retorted, "I dare not be upset but have to congratulate Official Xiang instead for being able to marry the beautiful daughter of Lu Buwei!"

Xiang Shaolong finally understood her concern and smiled, "Grand Tutor Qin is mistaken. This is a complicated affair. In reality, Lu Buwei does not want to marry her daughter to me and neither do I want to marry her."

Qin Qing was shocked, "Then why did Empress tell me that Lu Buwei has asked her to arrange the marriage and that you have agreed to the wedding?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled at her and softly pleaded, "Will Grand Tutor Qin please trust me this once? After the hunting fair, you can find out the truth from sister Yanran."

Qin Qing's face tightened and she shot with displeasure, "Why is Official Xiang always so secretive and says things halfway? Are you treating me like an outsider?"

Xiang Shaolong did not mean to hide things from her but looking at her enthusiasm, he was tempted and asked, "Do you think I treat you like an outsider?"

Both Qin Qing's cheeks turned red and she wailed, "Official Xiang is going to be rude to me again?"

Xiang Shaolong remembered that day when he hugged her slender waist. He coughed, "I dare not."

Qin Qing noticed his eyes focusing on her own waist and was infuriated. Lowering her head, she bit her lips and demanded, "Are you saying or not?"

Xiang Shaolong saw her pouting like his lover and was aroused. Leaning forward towards her body, he moved his lips to her jade ears and enjoyed her nice fragrance. He whispered, "This is a big secret which cannot be known to a third person. Please forgive me for speaking to you in this manner."

Qin Qing trembled slightly and her ears were red already. Feeling itchy at the ears, she wailed, "Does Official Xiang know what he is doing?"

Since Qin Qing did not shy away, Xiang Shaolong is even more excited at approaching this untouchable woman. He teased, "Shall I go ahead and tell you the secret then?"

Qin Qing dared not look at him and nodded slightly.

Xiang Shaolong held back the urge to kiss her earlobe but cannot resist staring at her fast heaving chest. He gently divulged, "Lu Buwei has sent someone to poison me and estimate that I will not survive these two days. Therefore, he decided to marry his daughter to me and even proclaim it to the whole world so that when I am killed, no one will suspect him and he can even deceive Empress."

Qin Qing shook strongly and her face became as white as a sheet. She turned to face him and their lips nearly met.

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and retreated half a feet. Feeling regretful, he apologised, "I am sorry for alarming Grand Tutor Qin. Luckily, I have the poison removed from my body and Lu Buwei still has no idea. He will try his best to annul the marriage later and the Empress will know that he

is trying to deceive her. That is the reason why I accept the marriage proposal.”

Qin Qing sighed with relief and put her hands on her heart, scolding, “You gave me such a fright.”

Her face began to regain some colour and it was a captivating sight.

Xiang Shaolong was appreciative, “Thanks for Grand Tutor Qin’s concern.”

Her face may still be slightly red but she has recomposed herself. Smiling lightly, she gently state, “I have mistaken you! And I forgive you for being rude to me but you must not do it again in the future. Oh! My ear is so itchy.”

Xiang Shaolong is fully intoxicated and nodded with a smile, “Let me consider about whether I will be rude to you in the future and tell you my decision later. This is a big secret which you must keep it to yourself.”

Qin Qing giggled and shot him a lovely look. She gingerly stood up and sighed, “You! You are incorrigible.”

Xiang Shaolong stood up with her and shrugged his shoulders, “I will be thanking the heavens as long as Grand Tutor Qin is not always angry at me.”

Qin Qing slowly sighed, “You are the reason for my anger! You are always so secretive and I always have to force you to tell me the truth. Right! When you shot the five flying needles earlier, it has caused such a commotion that now the whole camp knows about it. When I came out of the

Empress's tent, I saw Guan Zhongxie and Ying Ying analyzing the needles on the target board."

She lowered her head and softly pleaded, "Can Official Xiang give me one of your flying needles as a gift?"

Without hesitation, Xiang Shaolong drew out a flying needle from his waist belt and smoothly grabbed her hand and pressed the needle in the centre of her palm. He coaxed, "Please forgive me for being rude to you again."

In normal circumstances, no man is allowed to touch her hand.

Qin Qing was taken by surprise at his molest and quickly withdrew her hand, wailing, "You..."

Xiang Shaolong put a finger to his lips and signalled her to keep quiet. He pointed outside the tent to indicate that he is afraid that others will hear her wailing. He then smiled, "This is the price to pay for being my confidante. In the future, I will look for you and will be polite and rude as I please."

Qin Qing's expression became annoyed and walked towards the tent exit. At the exit, she stopped and coldly state, "You have arms and legs and you can visit me if you like and not visit me if you don't like. Who cares!" She left in a huff.

Xiang Shaolong shook his head with a bitter smile. He and Qin Qing are losing more and more of their self-control. One fine day, they will land up in bed and the consequences will be disastrous.

But if he can conduct an illicit affair with her, it will be tremendously thrilling!

The hunting parties crossed the river in different batches.

Under Xu Xian's instructions, another two more bridges were built so there is now a total of four bridges.

The plains were filled with sounds of hunting dogs barking. Those with hunting eagles sent the eagles up in the air to showcase their grandeur and might.

Xiang Shaolong thought about Zhou Liang's Warrior Eagles and was very interested in them. In the future, he will have his own eagles to help his fight and they will be remarkable toys too.

Ji Yanran, Qin Qing and the girls joined Empress Ji's hunting party while he himself left to join Xiao Pan's party.

It is better for him to avoid Zhu Ji so as to prevent any awkwardness and it will also prevent Lao Ai from being jealous of him.

When he came to the river bank, Xiao Pan has begun crossing the River Jing under the protection of the palace guards. Xiang Shaolong and the Eighteen Guardians rushed to the back of the queue and ran into Guan Zhongxie.

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "I thought Official Guan has joined the Female Warriors!"

Guan Zhongxie knew that he is teasing him for spending all his time with Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er. He plainly state,

“Work is more important. If I do not chase them off, Official Xiang will blame me for neglecting my work.”

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization. Since they are killing Lu Gong, Lu Dan’er will no longer be of any use to them. That is why Guan Zhongxie is disregarding Lu Dan’er now.

Ying Ying is Guan Zhongxie’s way to spy on the Lord Changping brothers. But since Xiang Shaolong, Lu Gong, etc will be killed during Lord Gaoling’s ambush, the Changping brothers will be blamed for their incompetence and Lu Buwei will force Empress Zhu Ji to execute them. Lu Buwei will then be able to fill up the posts of the leader of the palace guards with his own subordinates.

After all, the Imperial Infantry army is behind protecting Xianyang City and will not be involved with Lord Gaoling’s ambush. Thus, Guan Zhongxie will be not implicated.

As a result, this heartless man Guan Zhongxie cannot be bothered with Ying Ying anymore.

Mo Ao’s devious scheme is truly formidable. Originally, Xiang Shaolong and the rest would have suffered a huge defeat. It is due to pure luck that they now have the upper hand!

Guan Zhongxie saw that Xiang Shaolong is silent and thought that he is angry. He frantically flattered, “Official Xiang’s wondrous flying needles skill is unparalleled. I submit to your superior talents.”

Xiang Shaolong dished, “It is nothing great!”



As both men rode across the wooden bridge, heavy sounds of hoof beats can be heard as the horses are now stepping on wood.

A strong wind blew towards them and Xiang Shaolong is in a great mood. The sun is slowly setting in the west horizon and its last rays shone across the flatlands like a sheet of gold.

Guan Zhongxie reminded, "I nearly forgot. Premier Lu is looking for Official Xiang."

Xiang Shaolong grunted a reply and rode back to shore towards the main tents.

## CHAPTER 6

## Campfire Banquet

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

THE east shore of River Jing is an unending wilderness for hundreds of miles. With occasional hills, thick forests and small streams, it is a hunter's dream come true.

Even with ten thousand hunters threading on the plains, they looked like small animals from the bird's eye view. In an instant, everyone was split apart as they began hunting for animals.

Xiao Pan's hunting party is the largest as it includes Zhu Ji's party as well as other members of the royal family. They did

not participate in the hunt directly but were leisurely standing near the river bank and admiring the activities.

Lu Buwei led Xiang Shaolong up a small hill and they looked down at the hunting dogs chasing and barking at a prey while Xiao Pan, Wang Ben, the Changping Brothers and a group of palace guards chasing behind them. He joyfully remarked, "I have spoken to Empress. During the campfire banquet later, she will personally announce the marriage of you and Niangrong."

Xiang Shaolong is full of admiration at his convincing acting skills.

Lu Buwei asked, "You should be agreeable, right?"

Xiang Shaolong plainly replied, "I am only concerned that I am not good enough for her."

Lu Buwei chortled, "I have always been appreciative of your humbleness. When I move into the new Premier Residence, I will see to the marriage immediately and fulfil one of my greatest wishes."

Xiang Shaolong secretly sniggered that he will instead have a big headache when that really happens. Visioning their future troubles, he was jumping for joy inside.

Lu Buwei asked again, "Has there been any news about Lord Gaoling?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be worried, "I have sent someone to spy on him but we have yet to detect any ambushing army. We may have been overly suspicious."

Lu Buwei agreed, "Well, it is better to be safe than sorry. I shall put you fully in charge of this."

He then softly sighed, "Shaolong! Are you still suspicious of my sincerity?"

Xiang Shaolong was caught unaware and he was speechless for a while. He stuttered, "Why does Premier Lu say so?"

Lu Buwei bitterly smiled, "Shaolong need not deceive me. When Zhongxie invited you for drinks at Drunken Wind Brothel last night, he saw you discarding the wine Dan Meimei poured for you. Ai! Do you think the wine is poisonous?"

Xiang Shaolong took his hat off him. He knew he must give a reply and smiled bitterly in return, "As what Premier Lu says, it is better to be safe than sorry."

They exchanged a glance and burst out laughing at the same time.

Lu Buwei clapped Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and mentioned between his laughs, "When Niangrong marries you, you will be my son-in-law. By then, you can drink all the wine you want with peace of mind."

Xiang Shaolong has to acknowledge his prowess. Lu Buwei's words is trying to convince him that he has been overly suspicious with Dan Meimei and gain his loyalty even at the last moment before his death. This brainwave must have come from Mo Ao to prevent Xiang Shaolong from working with Xu Xian to attack them before the third hunting day.

Thinking about this, he laughed happily.

Under the shimmering stars and the bright moon, the camp is in a celebratory mood.

The animals that were hunted were being promptly roasted over fire spits. Different campfires scattered around the campsite has made the entire camping ground glowing with a beautiful red.

The ten best hunters have been invited to the royal tent to be rewarded by Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan and will join their table at the Campfire Banquet.

Wu Tingfang is the best hunter among the girls and is busying cleaning her catch with Zhao Zhi and the Tian sisters. Ji Yanran and Qin Qing are seated on one side and are in deep conversation.

Xiang Shaolong and the Lord Changping brothers have just come back from their patrol. They reminded the soldiers not to neglect their duties despite the festive mood and keep their guard up at all times. Teng Yi and Jing Jun came back shortly after them.

Both men had just led the Wu Family Elite Army into battle positions and they are now spying on Lord Gaoling's men. Xiang Shaolong can finally relieve this burden of ambush from his mind. After some discussion with them, he left to find Xu Xian. Just as he crossed the defending gates, he was detained by Ying Ying.

This lass has an unfriendly expression on her face and she coldly state, "Xiang Shaolong! Come with me!"

Puzzled, he followed her down the slope and they advanced deeply into a group of tents. Compared to the lights and sounds of the assembly grounds, they are now in a place where it is much more quiet, dark and serene.

Ying Ying leaned against a tent and stared at him viciously.

Her long hair was let down and it is still wet in some areas. She carries a fragrance that is associated with a woman's scent after a shower. Needless to say, she must have had a nice shower in the nearby river.

Out of a sudden, his mind is filled with various questions.

Since he got to know Ying Ying, he has been troubled with her and it is hard to establish their relationship properly. Moreover, he was busy with work and countering Lu Buwei. Thus, he did not spend much time to think about her.

Now that Mo Ao is going to die, he has some room to think about the future.

Since he is opposing Lu Buwei, he should ruthlessly snatch her from the hands of Guan Zhongxie. Additionally, it is common for men in this era to have multiple wives. After all, she is a rare beauty too. When they are married, he will share a closer relationship with the Lord Changping brothers. The Qin military and the royal family will see him as their own family. At the same time, it will deal a blow to Guan Zhongxie.

If Lu Gong is not going to die, the Lord Changping brothers will keep their jobs. Guan Zhongxie will then try to woo Ying Ying to secure his position in Xianyang City.

For Lu Dan'er, Lu Gong has opposed their relationship and Guan Zhongxie cannot disregard this powerful general. Even if Zhu Ji interferes, Lu Gong will not budge. Ying Ying, on the other hand, does not have this issue.

Whoever marries Ying Ying will only stand to benefit. Thinking about this, he cannot help but smile bitterly. There is a price to pay for marrying this stubborn girl. He wonders if he should harden his heart.

If he wants to woo Ying Ying, the hunting fair would be his best opportunity as Guan Zhongxie will be disregarding her. After the hunting fair, he will have to contend with Guan Zhongxie for her attention. Frankly speaking, he could not be bothered about Guan Zhongxie's antics.

As these thoughts ran through his mind like a shooting meteor, Ying Ying hatefully exclaimed, "Xiang Shaolong! Do you hate me a lot? Whenever I look for you, you are always so apprehensive and even use your leg injury as an excuse. Now, you can even perform your flying needles stunt in front of the Crown Prince. Now, the whole camp thinks that you are out to annoy me. How are we going to settle this debt?"

Xiang Shaolong realised that she had seen his exceptional flying needles and is now full of admiration for him.

She may be putting on an aggressive front but is actually trying to mend fences with him. Thus, she came to find him alone without the rest of the female warriors.

Xiang Shaolong took two steps forward and reached an intimate distance with her. They are now so close he can hear her breathing. He smiled, "Fine! It is my fault. But my leg is really injured! If you don't believe me, I can take off my pants and show you!"

Ying Ying's face reddened immediately and she stomped her feet, "Who wants to see you without your pants? I want you to throw the flying needles again."

Xiang Shaolong was agonized and knew that he cannot match up to his earlier performance. He bitterly smiled, "When I threw the flying needles earlier, my wound reopened. Can we find some other things to do instead?"

Ying Ying's attitude to him has indeed improved. She innocently asked, "What shall we do?"

Xiang Shaolong was inspired as he recalled her brother saying that the people of Qin are uncivilised barbarians who are more open minded. His eyes cannot help but strayed to her full bosom. He asked, "Where is your tent?"

Ying Ying's face is burning red and she wailed, "What are you looking at?"

She retreated half a step and her back is fully up against the tent.



Xiang Shaolong mocked, "Every man loves to look at the figure of a beautiful woman and Miss Ying need not over react! At dawn, I am going to your tent to seek your forgiveness and this should give you enough face already."

Ying Ying was delighted and stretched out her pinkie, smiling, "You promise?"

Xiang Shaolong stretched out his own pinkie and hook onto hers. Admiring her large and attractive eyes, he cautioned, "You must not ambush me in your tent. Hng!"

Ying Ying knows that this man is eyeing her chest and yet she props her chest up even more and hissed, "Who wants to ambush you? Remember! If you do not show up, I will hate you for the rest of my life."

Using his pinkie, Xiang Shaolong pulled Ying Ying towards him. Ying Ying let out a shrill cry and fell on him and her pert breasts pressed against his muscular chest without any reservations. She was shocked and moved away hastily out of his bosom but did not appear to be annoyed. She shot him a look and described, "My tent is to the west of the Royal Tent with a purple flag. There is a purple flower sewn on the door of the tent door. Do not forget."

Smiling sweetly, she skipped away like a child.

Xiang Shaolong did not anticipate that their grievances can be so easily settled and was pleased. He guessed that the people of Qin love hunting fairs because it is also a good time to date as well.

The main assembly ground is used for the campfire banquet. It is an outdoor dining concept with tents, defending gates and defending walls surrounding it.

Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji were the hosts of the banquet and took the northern seats. In front of them are three rows of sixty odd tables and each table can seat four to six men. Torches were placed between each table which adds to the atmosphere of the banquet.

Wine was free flowing and food is naturally their hunting prey. There are all kinds of barbequed and fragrant fowl meat and animal meat.

Except for Lord Gaoling and Tian Dan who excused themselves, everyone from the royal family is present. Besides some special guests like Lu Dan'er, Ying Ying, Ji Yanran, etc, the remaining participants are the ten best hunters. Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang, Zhao Zhi and Qin Qing are sharing one table which caused Lu Gong to stare at their table occasionally. The younger men with less willpower are almost staring at them non-stop. Heading one of the rows is Prince Dan and Xu Yize, who chatted with Zhu Ji once in a while.

Ji Yanran and the ladies are adopting a carefree attitude and disregarded the fact that they are the centre of attraction.

This is the first time Xiao Pan is hosting such a grand and unique banquet. He was fidgeting in his seat and his expression looked unnatural.

But the most nervous man is Lao Ai who is seated behind Zhu Ji. Zhu Ji had informed him that the Crown Prince will personally announce his promotion later.

The most unfortunate man is Xiang Shaolong. He was allocated to Lu Buwei's table and was squeezed between Lu Buwei and the heartless Lu Nianrong cum Guan Zhongxie. Mo Ao is not invited as his status is not high enough and it also suits his low profile.

Everyone toasted Xiao Pan first before Lu Buwei gave a welcome speech. Following that, Xiao Pan took the stand and announced the start of the banquet.

Lu Buwei toasted Xu Xian and Lu Gong first before he sat down and commented to Xiao Pan, "I heard Crown Prince shot a condor earlier. This is a good omen. We shall enjoy a year of bountiful harvest and peace within the nation."

Xiao Pan joyfully raised his cup, "Right Premier, let me toast you."

Lu Buwei quickly drank up.

Besides them, Xiang Shaolong was cheering in his heart. Lu Buwei's acting could have won him a Lifetime Achievement Award while Xiao Pan could have won the Best Male Actor Award. After all, he will be the main leader during this era.

Guan Zhongxie spoke out, "Will Official Xiang perform his flying needles stunt again to honour the banquet hosted by the Crown Prince?"

Xiang Shaolong cursed secretly and turned his head around. He could sense intense awkwardness from Lu Niangrong and he weakly smiled at her before telling Guan Zhongxie, "Mine is a lousy skill not worth mentioning. I have yet to see Official Guan with his iron bow. Will Official Guan fulfil my wish?"

He laughed to himself. He is sure Guan Zhongxie will somehow display his talent and impress the people of Qin just like what he did with the flying needles.

Guan Zhongxie laughed loudly, "As long as it is an order from Official Xiang, I will not dare to disobey. If not for Official Xiang's injury, I would love to spar with you and learn from an expert like yourself."

From his words, Xiang Shaolong is certain that he will show off his skill at the assembly ground after the dinner.

Behind him, Lu Buwei leaned over and instructed Lu Niangrong, "Niangrong, you must serve Official Xiang well."

Lu Niangrong batted an eye at Xiang Shaolong and replied, "But Official Xiang has not spoken to me yet!"

Lu Buwei patted Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and exclaimed; "Shaolong! Make her happy."

Xiang Shaolong can sense Zhu Ji, Ji Yanran, Qin Qing and everyone else looking at them. Totally uncomfortable, he bitterly smiled, "I got it."

Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie began to chat among themselves and provided an opportunity for them to interact.

Xiang Shaolong looked at Lu Nianrong and she happened to look back. Xiang Shaolong forcefully smiled, "What did Third Mistress catch today?"

Initially, Lu Nianrong managed to force out a smile but her face darkened when she faced his penetrating eyes. She lowered her head and shook it, replying, "I am not in the mood to hunt today."

Xiang Shaolong thought that she is not so bad after all as she is suffering from a guilty conscience. He wondered aloud, "Am I the one behind your bad mood?"

Lu Nianrong trembled slightly and raised her face, assessing him with a look of dilemma on her face.

Under the illumination of the torch, Lu Nianrong looks youthful and charming. Her beauty can be compared to Ying Ying's but her figure is not as good as hers.

He sensed that something is amiss. Apparently, Lu Nianrong's eyes have turned red and she is crying.

Even Lu Buwei saw her crying and frantically exclaimed, "Nianrong! Do you want to go back to your tent and rest?"

As Lu Nianrong unsteadily stood up, she attracted the attention of Zhu Ji, Xiao Pan, Qin Qing, Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang, Zhao Zhi, Lu Gong and Xu Xian. As the tears begin

to fall from her face onto her clothes, she wailed, "I am not marrying him!"

Despite Lu Buwei's coaxing, she ran off into the tents in the background after finishing her words. As the majority of the crowd is busy engaging in wine and revelry, not many people are aware of her outburst. The lively mood of the banquet is not affected by her disturbance.

Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie watched helplessly as she ran off into the darkness.

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to have a better opinion of her. She is not totally like her father who can lie with his eyes wide open. At the same time, he concluded that she has some feelings for him.

Lao Ai came over to invite Lu Buwei on Zhu Ji's instructions. Lu Buwei winked at Guan Zhongxie before he left.

Guan Zhongxie is about to chase after Lu Niangrong when Xiang Shaolong grabbed him and reasoned, "Let her go! Love cannot be forced."

Guan Zhongxie was taken aback and returned to his seat, smiling bitterly, "Official Xiang is right!"

Lu Buwei came back to their table and sighed in a deep voice, "We will postpone the wedding until further notice! Ai! Shaolong! I do not know what to say."

Xiang Shaolong is secretly delighted but feigned sadness, "Premier Lu need not fret. Hei! I wish..."

He wanted to find a reason to slip away from Lao Ai approached their table again but it was Xiang Shaolong he invited this time round.

Xiang Shaolong feared Zhu Ji the most and forced himself to go to her table. When he came to her, Zhu Ji plainly stated, "Shaolong need not pay his respects. Have a seat!"

Xiang Shaolong sat down adjoining her and whispered, "What instructions does Empress have?"

He noticed Lao Ai seated five feet behind Zhu Ji trying to listen to their conversation. The environment is quite noisy and he is sure Lao Ai cannot eavesdrop very well.

Under Lao Ai's nourishment, Zhu Ji is like a brand new person and is even more enchanting than before. She slowly assessed him and sighed, "Shaolong! Both you and Zheng'er have changed."

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to say these words. Shocked, he exclaimed, "Empress!"

An irritated Zhu Ji scolded, "I do not want to hear any hypocritical words from you. Ai! Are both of you blaming me?"

At the last sentence, she softened her tone and her words carried some tinge of helplessness.

Xiang Shaolong is filled with emotions. He knew that he can prevent her from being seduced by Lao Ai but he cannot go against fate and allow himself to replace Lao Ai. That is why

he did not succumb to her and allowed her to sink deeper into Lao Ai's love trap. Guilt-ridden, he was dumbfounded.

Zhu Ji leaned closer and whispered, "Every time we did it, I imagined that I am doing it with you, understand?"

Xiang Shaolong shook uncontrollably and cannot help but look up to her pretty face.

Zhu Ji's eyes turned slightly red and she avoided his gaze. Recomposing herself, she calmly ordered, "Commander Xiang, you are dismissed!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned for a moment before he returned to Lu Buwei's table.

Before he can say a word to the two men, Lu Dan'er and Ying Ying were holding each other's hands and skipped up to them. They insist on bringing Guan Zhongxie to their table to compete on wine-drinking but their eyes were mainly fixated on Xiang Shaolong.

Guan Zhongxie is not in the mood and evaded, "I am been ordered by Official Xiang to perform later."

He faced Xiang Shaolong and continued, "If Official Xiang does not want to see me screw up, he will have to substitute me in accepting the challenge of these two ladies."

Xiang Shaolong is afraid that Lu Buwei will interrogate him on what Zhu Ji has said to him and laughed out loud, "Official Guan is so eloquent!"

He turned around and left with the girls.



Lu Dan'er is pleasantly surprised and happily pinched him, cooing, "Looks like you are a clever man. Shall we bury the hatchet?"

Xiang Shaolong was amused that Ying Ying did not tell Lu Dan'er what had happened between them earlier. He winked at Ying Ying and is about to reply her when two men appeared and blocked their path. It was Lord Changwen and Jing Jun. Jing Jun smiled, "Are the two Mistresses trying to make my Third Brother drunk? You have to challenge me first."

The two ladies saw him with a wine flask in his left hand and a wine cup in his right hand. Stopping, they accepted, "Do you think we are afraid of you?"

Xiang Shaolong did not expect Jing Jun to be so familiar with them and guessed that they have crossed paths before.

Lord Changwen faced Xiang Shaolong and smiled, "Has Official Xiang received the red flower from Sister and Dan'er?"

The face of both girls immediately became red and they stared ferociously at Xiang Shaolong.

Lu Dan'er put her hands on her waist and wailed, "What is the use of giving it to him? He is a useless cripple."

Perplexed, Xiang Shaolong questioned, "What is the red flower?"

Jing Jun joked, "You can give him the flower but I will represent him in doing the deed."

Both girls started to laugh and protest. Their faces are thoroughly red and they looked even more enchanting under the illumination of the torches.

Lord Changwen stepped forward and explained to Xiang Shaolong, "It is our Qin custom. During the hunting fair, an unmarried girl can present an embroidered red flower to a man she likes. The man can then visit her in her tent to spend the night. Hei! Now you understand!"

Xiang Shaolong did not expect the Qin ladies to be so open minded and was flabbergasted. He unconsciously shifted his gaze to the two ladies. Ying Ying stomped her foot and yelled, "Second Brother, you are spouting nonsense."

Lu Dan'er charmingly smiled, "I have not decided who to give my flower to. Let's see what happens later."

Xiang Shaolong was visibly excited. The open-minded Qin girl is something the other six states can never offer. He smiled at Jing Jun, "Little Jun! Miss Dan'er is dropping you a big hint."

Lord Changwen joked, "So if your Fifth Brother gets the flower, are you performing the deed for him?"

Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er may be the butt of their jokes but did not mind them at all. They only coquettishly protest which makes them even more interesting.

Jing Jun loves to flirt with women and smiled, "If I managed to get both red flowers from both ladies, I will leave Miss

Ying to my Third Brother and keep Miss Dan'er for myself. Ao!"

Lu Dan'er sent him a kick. Jing Jun sprang up and flipped to the side. His two hands were still holding the wine flask and wine cup but not a single drop of wine has spilled. The other four persons were amazed at his agility.

The banquet is still in progress and the two hundred odd guests are still having a good time. Here, they are also having their own fun.

This is the first time Lord Changwen had seen Jing Jun's skills and he breathes in heavily, "Based on this skill, Dan'er should give you her red flower."

Lu Dan'er enthusiastically stared at Jing Jun, "You monkey! Flip one more time for me."

With a lazy and annoying look on his face, Jing Jun cheekily glanced at Lu Dan'er and joked, "If you become a female monkey, I will become a male monkey and bring you to the trees and somersault non-stop."

Lu Dan'er let out a war cry and rushed forward with two clenched fists. Jing Jun actually managed to drink his wine and avoided her blows at the same time. With Lu Dan'er hot at his heels, they soon disappeared among the tents.

Xiang Shaolong was moved. Jing Jun may not be a Qin native but he is a sworn brother of him and Wang Jian. Moreover, he holds a military post. Lu Gong may agree to let him date Lu Dan'er.

Lu Dan'er is a teenage girl and it is a stage where she is very indecisive. She is interested in Guan Zhongxie because of his heroic air. If Jing Jun can humour her and with Lu Gong's support, coupled with their compatible age and their similar love for fun, they may eventually fall in love. This will prevent Guan Zhongxie from using Lu Dan'er to penetrate the influential circles of the Qin military.

A bell was struck and everyone quietened down. The three persons stood still and listened to Xiao Pan's speech.

Xiao Pan stood up and greeted the Empress. He then proclaimed the ten best hunters to be promoted to the rank of Captain with immediate effect.

The ten young men were overjoyed and hurriedly knelt down, giving thanks to Xiao Pan and swearing their loyalty to him.

Xiao Pan continued to announce a slew of promotions, including promoting Teng Sheng as the new Outer Custodian and Lao Ai as the Inner Custodian.

Some officials felt that Lao Ai's promotion is undeserved. But looking at Empress Zhu Ji fawning over him and the lack of objections from Xu Xian and Lu Gong, they accepted the changes reluctantly.

It was followed by 'ShowTime'. First, Xiao Pan listed Lu Buwei's achievements in conquering the three provinces and promoted him to become the new Premier Mentor. It is just a post without any authority. Needless to say, it was Li Si who prepared this speech for him.

Although Lu Buwei wields plenty of power in the Qin Court, as long as the two influential men Xu Xian and Lu Gong do not object, this promotion will be official.

Finally, everyone toasted one another and the banquet came to a conclusion.

Lord Changwen frantically excused him and rushed forward to escort Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji.

Slightly fearful, Ying Ying retreated two steps and whined, "Remember what you promised."

Xiang Shaolong objected, "I take my word back. We have decided to reconcile but you flirted with another man in front of me. Now that he is gone, you are using me as a substitute."

Ying Ying stomped her feet, "It is not what you see. I actually wanted to... Ah! Who do you think you are? Why must I explain things to you?"

Xiang Shaolong saw that she was infuriated and she is beginning to cry. Beside them, everyone is leaving the banquet area. He softened and smiled, "All right! I surrender. I am fine with being a substitute."

Ying Ying is so incensed she nearly wanted to draw her sword. She roared, "I said that you are not a substitute. I have always... Forget it! You try skipping our appointment!" She turned around and stomped away.

Xiang Shaolong shouted, "What about the red flower?"

Ying Ying increased her pace away from him.

Xiang Shaolong turned around and came face to face with Ji Yanran. The beauty batted an eye at him and sighed, "Hubby has regained his flirty ways."

Xiang Shaolong sighed and pulled her to one side, explaining the real reason behind Ying Ying's seduction.

Ji Yanran sighed, "Hubby must be careful. Earlier, Guan Zhongxie has been paying close attention to all of you. He may try to sow discord between the two of you. After all, Ying Ying belongs to the royal family and Guan Zhongxie will only stand to benefit if he marries her."

Xiang Shaolong assured, "Since the demise of Princess Qian and the maids, I have lost my interests in girls and only hope to spend the rest of my life in peace with all of you. If Ying Ying chooses to marry Guan Zhongxie, so be it."

Ji Yanran dragged him aside to avoid the men riding horses in their direction. She whispered, "Do you swear that you have no feelings for Sister Qin?"

Xiang Shaolong's face reddened, "Why did you bring her up?"

Ji Yanran questioned, "What did the two of you say in the tent? When she left, her face is thoroughly red and full of joy."

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "I speak normally! It is her skin which is too thin."

Ji Yanran slightly whined, "Sister Qin is someone with lots of self-control. She is in love with you and that is why her skin has become thin."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "It is my fault! Ai! Why do I always get into this kind of trouble?"

Ji Yanran smiled, "You are good looking, kind hearted and eloquent. Otherwise, I will not have been won over by your antics and become your wife."

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "How dare you say I use antics to seduce you? I am not going to let you off!"

Ji Yanran charmingly giggled, "Who needs you to let me off?"

Xiang Shaolong was aroused and cheerful Jing Jun happened to come back. He laughed, "The night performances are about to begin. Are Third Brother and Third Sister going to stay here and enjoy each other's company?"

In the midst of laughter and scolding, the three people walked towards the defending gates.

Xiang Shaolong took this chance to ask him about Lu Dan'er.

Jing Jun happily recalled, "This lass is really bitchy. Even after I molested her, she still came after me. Finally, I protected my head and allowed her to trash me. She may have a fearsome look on her face and her blows are definitely controlled to avoid hurting me. So exciting!"

As Xiang Shaolong waved to acknowledge everyone around them, he reminded, "To win her heart, you must take advantage of these two days. Do you understand?"

Jing Jun nodded his head vigorously and instantly disappeared into the crowd in an unknown direction. Behind him, Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran could not help but break out into smiles.



## CHAPTER 7

## Exchanging Pointers On The Duelling Ground

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

FOUR young lads were riding handsome horses and entered the assembly ground from the east. When they arrived at the centre of the grounds, they picked up speed and strung an arrow to their bow at the same time. It was a neat formation and the crowd of ten thousand people is cheering for them. Just as everyone expected them to shoot their arrows at the target boards, the four men actually flipped upside down and fire their arrows while they were positioned under the horses' belly. Zng! All the four arrows

managed to hit the centre ring of the target board while one arrow nearly hit the bull's eye. While the arrows are still quivering on the target board, the four men have flipped back onto their saddles and rode across the grandstand, saluting Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji. The crowd burst out into loud cheering and applause.

Most of the crowd were seated on the slope between the assembly ground and the royal tents. As they are looking down from a higher place, they actually enjoy a better view compared to those at the stands.

After the four riders have left, everyone was still fascinated by their amazing performance. Since no one is confident of performing a better show, the stage was unoccupied for the time being.

Xiao Pan stood up from his grandstand and threw four arrows down to the four riders.

The four men are mad with glee. They leapt down the horse and picked up the arrows. They proceeded up the grandstand to receive their rewards from Xiao Pan.

Xiang Shaolong, his three wives, two maids, Teng Yi, Qin Qing and the Eighteen Guardians were seated on the slope and watching the activities from afar. They are finally beginning to understand the importance of this hunting fair to the people of Qin.

It is equivalent to the Olympic Games of the modern world.

Every ambitious man will use these three days to showcase his talent so as to win military promotions and gain the favour of the royal family as well as the various high ranking officials.

The really capable ones will even win the affection of girls from prestigious families like Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er. They will stand to benefit in their love life and career paths.

The annual hunting fair is a highlight of Qin. But not everyone is eligible to participate. Except for the royal family and families of high ranking officials, other participants must go through a selection by their various departments before they can take part in the hunting fair.

Among his three wives, Wu Tingfang is the most boisterous. She clapped and shouted nonstop at the performances.

Xiang Shaolong was about to say something to Teng Yi when he noticed his brows furrowed. Curious, he implored, "Is something bothering Second Brother?"

Teng Yi composed himself and replied in a deep voice, "I was just wondering – Lu Buwei has such a confident demeanour; isn't he concerned that Lu Gong, Xu Xian and you might summon the Qin army to annihilate him? Although he is protected by first rate fighters, they are only numbering around one hundred. Even with a few more Guan Zhongxie, he is considered careless about his personal security."

Xiang Shaolong guessed, "I think he is sure that I cannot manipulate the palace guards to attack him. Moreover, the

Crown Prince will protect him as the new Premier Mentor and he knew that we will not act hastily.”

Teng Yi shook his head, “This is unlike Mo Ao’s usual methods. From the start, they have always been one step ahead of us while we are struggling to defend ourselves from them. In such a crucial juncture, it is less likely that they will be neglectful.”

Xiang Shaolong agreed that his words make sense and began to think deeply too.

Teng Yi stared at the grandstand opposite them where Zhu Ji and Lu Buwei are sitting and shifted his gaze to Prince Dan and Tian Dan beside them. He mused, “It is such a grand occasion. Why is Tian Dan’s favourite general Dan Chu absent?”

Xiang Shaolong gestured Wu Yanzhu and Wu Shu to his side and instructed them to spy on the Qi people, smiling, “It is no use thinking about it. Let’s spy on them and see what is going on.”

On his other side, Wu Tingfang elbowed him, “That’s great! Hubby! Look! It is Little Jun!”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were rejuvenated and looked down to the assembly ground.

Under Jing Jun’s leadership, a few hundred cavalry soldiers rode out. Half of them are from the Wu Family Elite army. Everyone has a lance in their right hand and a shield in their

left hand. Using only their legs to control their horses, they performed a variety of stunts and poses.

Jing Jun is even more imposing. Barking command after command, he directed his men with utmost confidence, evoking loud cheers and whistles from the crowd.

The female warriors were squeezed on one side of the crowd and they acted as Jing Jun's cheerleaders under the leadership of Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er.

On the grandstand, Lu Gong and the other military leaders nodded their heads in acknowledgement and praise. Once in a while, they will pass favourable comments.

In these warring times, only a well-trained army can gain their attention.

Zhao Zhi happily cried, "Little Jun is really something!"

Suddenly, the soldiers split into two groups and carried out a mock attack on each other. As the horses brush past each other, sounds of weapons clashing can be heard. After a few exciting demonstrations, everyone in the crowd has shouted until their voices were hoarse.

After the final clash, both groups combined into one group and face the grandstand resolutely. At the head of the group is Jing Jun armed with a shield and a lance. He first stood up on his saddle and executed a somersault over the horse's head. While in mid air, his shield was moving rapidly to protect his body while he pierced his lance several times at an invisible enemy. When he finally landed, he kneeled

down in a swift motion and paid his respects to Xiao Pan. It was a fluid movement altogether and there was no sign of breathlessness from him.

The crowd exploded into their biggest cheers and applause since the beginning of the night performances. Even the cold Qin Qing could not hold back and cheered for Jing Jun too.

Xiao Pan saw that he is Xiang Shaolong's sworn brother and is highly-skilled at the same time. Delighted, he actually jumped up, withdrew his personal sword and threw it down to the ground.

Jing Jun picked up his sword joyfully and howled another command. The cavalry troops marched neatly out of the assembly ground while he himself ascended the grandstand to claim his reward.

Xiang Shaolong could see that the crowd is still high after Jing Jun's performance. He turned his head to Ji Yanran and suggested, "If Talented Lady Ji will perform her incredible spear technique, I guarantee that the crowd will cheer loudly for you."

Ji Yanran and Qin Qing looked at him at the same time. With two of the world's most beautiful faces looking at him simultaneously, Xiang Shaolong was aroused.

Ji Yanran batted her eyes at him, "Yanran only needs Hubby's love and not the crowd's cheering."

Xiang Shaolong shifted his gaze to Qin Qing. She shot him a look and turned her face back to face the assembly ground.

After a few performances by the Palace Infantry and the Palace Cavalry, Ying Ying's female warriors took to the stage.

They may not be as well trained as Jing Jun's cavalry army but the two hundred young girls have their fair share of horse riding and archery experiences. Viewing their performance is also one of life's pleasures.

Among the crowd, the girls are clapping non-stop and the guys are even more generous with their cheering. Naturally, the cheering is even louder than the cheering for Jing Jun.

A gong was sounded.

Lu Gong stood up and paid his respects to Empress and Crown Prince. He proceeded to announce the main event of tonight – the Sword Duel.

As the crowd became serious, he solemnly barked, "Whoever can win three consecutive fights will be rewarded with ten taels of gold from the Crown Prince. You may even win a promotion. Gentlemen, show us what you are made of!"

Under thunderous applause, two men scrambled out.

Lord Changping and several palace guards stepped forward and helped both men put their armour on and each man is given a wooden sword.

After the two men bowed to each other, they began fighting. Within three strokes, one of the men was hit by his opponent.

A gong was sounded and Xu Xian the referee announced the winner.

After ten over fights, only a young man named Huan Qi managed to win three consecutive fights and he earned loud cheers from the crowd.

Xiang Shaolong is trying to locate Guan Zhongxie among the crowd. To Teng Yi, he checked, "Will Second Brother enter the fight later to test Guan Zhongxie's skills?"

Teng Yi smiled, "Why not?"

Both men exchanged a smile as another man entered the duelling ground. It is Lao Ai.

There are not many people who recognized him but they were impressed with his sturdy built, imposing air and alert expression. It was only until he announced his position and name did everyone realised that he is the Empress's pet Inner Custodian Lao Ai.

In this instant, another man entered the duelling ground. Everyone is surprised at the challenger. Apparently, it is the expert swordsman Lu Chan. This man is one of the best fighters from Lu Buwei's group after Guan Zhongxie.

Teng Yi observed, "This will be spectacular. Lu Buwei is purposely out to ruin his reputation and put him down."

Xiang Shaolong focused on the grandstand and noticed the concerned expressions of Xiao Pan, Zhu Ji, Lu Gong, Xu Xian, etc. He was glad that Lu Buwei is now officially opposing Lao Ai. If not for the body armour, Lu Buwei would have



instructed Lu Chan to injure Lao Ai's groin and destroy his usefulness to Zhu Ji.

Lu Chan has a rigid face, a fierce demeanour and is dark-skinned. Whoever sees him would be frightened by his appearance. After they have put on their armour, both men circled the assembly ground once and are viewing each other with caution.

Ji Yanran sighed, "Lu Buwei is familiar with Lao Ai's strengths and weaknesses. Since he sent Lu Chan, he must have a high chance of winning."

Xiang Shaolong saw the Lu Chan is expressionless and hard to fathom. He nodded, "This man's strength should lie in forceful attacks. Lu Buwei must have wanted him to attack Lao Ai relentlessly and make Lao Ai lose face in front of everyone. This will lower Lao Ai's standing in the eyes of Zhu Ji and the people of Qin."

Before he can even finish speaking, Lu Chan roared and attacked Lao Ai.

Qin Qing praised, "Official Xiang is truly a genius to make such accurate predictions."

No one spoke out anymore as everyone is fixated on the intense fighting.

Sounds of the wooden sword swishing through the air filled everyone's ears. Everyone held their breaths as they witnessed the most intensive fight since the beginning of the duels.

Lao Ai may realise that his arm strength is not as good as Lu Chan or he is out to waste Lu Chan's energy. He did his best to avoid his blows and did not meet his attacks head on.

Until Lu Chan's fourth stroke brushed past his head did Lao Ai roar loudly and deflected his blows. He focused on defending and deflecting his blows rather than attacking him.

Lu Chan's killing aura grew and he changed his sword styles, attacking Lao Ai mercilessly.

Lao Ai changed his sword styles too and defended himself well. He deflected his blows and retreated at the same time. After circling the assembly ground a few rounds, their steps were still firm and did not show any signs of exhaustion.

It is truly different when expert swordsmen fight.

Ying Ying's female warriors are impressed with Lao Ai's handsome looks and began cheering for him. Whenever he executed a skilful defensive stroke, they will cheer wildly for him. Teng Yi sighed, "Lu Chan has been tricked!"

Xiang Shaolong knew what he meant. Lu Chan and Lao Ai's swords skills are about the same level. Lu Chan has superior arm strength while Lao Ai is more agile. From the ongoing battle, it appears that Lao Ai is gaining the upper hand while Lu Chan is losing his energy very quickly. When he is exhausted, it will be Lao Ai's opportunity to defeat him.

Zhao Zhi was astonished, "Why didn't Lu Buwei send Guan Zhongxie?"

Xiang Shaolong looked over to her and noticed the Tian sisters nervously keeping their eyes closed as they were too afraid to watch the fighting. He cannot hold back but smiled, "Sending Guan Zhongxie will be the final straw."

Lu Chan is anxious to win and increased the intensity of the fight. Everyone is taken aback by his ferocity and their eyes followed his movements. Sounds of heavy clashing of the wooden swords filled the air.

Lao Ai suddenly stopped retreating and yelled madly. Like an angry dragon rising from the sea, his sword sliced forward and with a loud 'Pak!' he actually forced Lu Chan to retreat half a step. He continued with a flurry of attacks that sent Lu Chan into a defending position. Loud cheers and whistles were heard from the crowd.

Teng Yi shook his head and sighed, "There are so many advantages if you are handsome."

Lao Ai's attacks became more and more fearsome and his sword is almost everywhere, forcing Lu Chan to take several steps back. But Lu Chan has high endurance. Despite being at a disadvantage, he did not panic and everyone is also impressed with his resilience.

Out of the blue, Lao Ai ceased his attacks and took a few steps back. He bowed, "Brother Lu is highly-skilled. I cannot hope to defeat you."

The entire crowd quietened down.

Lu Chan was stunned for a while before he returned his greetings. Both men then paid their respects to the grandstand.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi glanced at each other. They did not expect Lao Ai to end this beautifully. He gave face to Lu Buwei and at the same time, he retreated when he was gaining the upper hand. Otherwise, if Guan Zhongxie challenges him in the next round, he will be in deep shit.

Xu Xian decided that it is a draw and rewarded each man with five taels of gold. The crowd was slightly disappointed.

Fortunately, the next fighters were all experts from the cavalry army and the palace guards. After several battles, the last fighter is Great General Wang He's Assistant General Bai Chong who has beaten two challengers. If he can win one more round, he will win the ten taels of gold.

Xiang Shaolong felt that the present fighters are all men from prestigious backgrounds, causing all his cavalry soldiers to hold back from participating. He commented to Teng Yi, "Guan Zhongxie should be fighting soon!"

Teng Yi reminded, "Not so fast! There is still Zhou Zihen!"

Before his sentence ended, a short and stout Zhou Zihen stepped out of the crowd and entered the duelling ground.

Everyone witnessed Bai Chong's double victory and guessed that he will too defeat this nameless man. Energized by this thought, they cheered even louder and the atmosphere is electrifying.

As everyone watched on, Zhou Zihen lifted the wooden sword and tested its weight. Abruptly, he brandished a dagger and swiftly sliced downwards. The end of the long sword was severed off, leaving only one and a half feet of sword length.

Everyone was blown away by his way of shortening his sword. Moreover, he used a small dagger to sever the heavy wooden sword in one blow and it takes a very sharp dagger to achieve that. Everyone was flabbergasted.

Zhou Zihen begged Xiao Pan's pardon, "Please forgive me as I am used to using short swords."

Xiao Pan's interest was piqued and he gestured his approval.

Bai Chong has a suspicious look on his face as he brandished his sword and awaited his attack. With a serious expression, he was ready to counterattack anytime.

In his heart, Xiang Shaolong deemed him to be a coward.

There is a saying, an inch shorter is an inch of danger. If Zhou Zihen is using such a short sword, his sword skills would be unorthodox and hard to defend against.

With only these two fighters, Lu Buwei is already instilling fear in others. Moreover, he still has Guan Zhongxie the champion swordsman.

Zhou Zihen snorted and moved forward at lightning speed. His wooden sword has morphed into a flurry of quick sword stances and his sword seemed to be everywhere. Clashing

head on with Bai Chong, this is the first time anyone has seen such a queer move.

Bai Chong was stunned and roared. He took half a step back before sweeping his sword horizontally across.

Du! Zhou Zihen's short sword parried away Bai Chong's long sword while his entire body crashed squarely into Bai Chong's chest.

Bai Chong was taken by surprise and suffered a heavy blow to his chest. He lost his grip on his long sword and he fell down in a sitting position.

Nobody expected Bai Chong to lose in one blow and everyone forgot to cheer.

Wang He and Bai Chong were disgraced while Lu Gong and the other generals were embarrassed. It was an awkward moment.

Finally, Lu Buwei took the lead in clapping and cheering for Zhou Zihen.

Like a dishonoured man, Bai Chong stood up and walked away.

Xiang Shaolong sucked in some cold air. He deduced that Zhou Zihen is someone well-versed in fighting at close proximity and he may have a hard time fighting him himself.

The atmosphere was tensed as Zhou Zihen proudly stood at the centre of the duelling ground, awaiting the next challenger. After some time, there were still no takers. Xiang

Shaolong caught sight of Lu Buwei talking to Zhu Ji and he must have been bragging about his skilful subordinate. He had a brainwave and inquired, "Where is Little Jun?"

Teng Yi had the same inspiration that only Jing Jun's agility can counter Zhou Zihen and groaned, "I do not know where he has sneaked off to. Without our consent, he dared not fight."

At this time, Xu Xian announced from the grandstand, "If there are no more challengers, we will assume that Zhou Zihen from Premier Lu Residence has won three consecutive fights."

The crowd became so quiet you can hear a pin drop.

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. If Zhou Zihen 'won three consecutive fights', the military would lose face as they cannot even defeat someone from Lu Buwei's forces.

At the instant, someone shouted, "Where is Commander Xiang?"

The moment the shout ended, the crowd of ten thousand people were chanting his name.

Ever since his duel with Wang Jian, he has been the number one swordsman in the eyes of the people of Qin. Moreover, he is a 'Qin native'. With this outsider arrogantly waiting for a challenger, everyone naturally hope that he will take the stand and regain some glory.

Cries of 'Xiang Shaolong' filled the mountains and valleys.

Xiang Shaolong saw that everyone around him was now staring at him. He was agonized. Even without his leg injury, it will be a difficult task to overcome Zhou Zihen. Now that his movement is limited, what should he do?



## CHAPTER 8

## The Mighty Jing Jun

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

ON the grandstand, Lu Buwei and Tian Dan have unnatural expressions on their faces as they did not expect Xiang Shaolong to enjoy such high standing among the people of Qin. In addition, Lu Buwei can clearly feel the racism of the Qin people against him and his family warriors. He felt a tinge of regret for trying to eliminate Xiang Shaolong. If they had been on good terms, the people of Qin may eventually accept him and he need not use Lao Ai to manipulate the Empress. He suppressed this thought from his mind. After

all, Xiang Shaolong has only two more days to live and it is a fact that cannot be changed.

Xiao Pan saw that Xiang Shaolong enjoys a favourable reputation among the military forces and the younger generation of Qin and was delighted for him. At the same time, it indirectly lowers Lu Buwei's standing. However, he was concerned about his leg injury and that he will disappoint the crowd by being unable to battle. While everyone is shouting his name incessantly, a figure somersaulted from within the ranks of the female warriors. This person cart wheeled continuously over ten rounds quickly and his face is a blur. No one can identify him but everyone was flabbergasted at his agility.

After a final mid air somersault, the person landed in front of the grandstand, kneeled down and pleaded, "Assistant Cavalry Commander Jing Jun asks to fight on behalf of my Commander. Will the Crown Prince please give your approval?"

Xiao Pan was overjoyed, "I approve Assistant Commander Jing's request."

Everyone saw that he was highly-skilled and volunteered himself first. Moreover, he is Xiang Shaolong's assistant commander and rewarded him with thunderous applause. Everyone anticipates a good fight between him and Zhou Zihen.

Jing Jun did not stand up yet. He loudly declared, "If I happened to win, all the glory of the victory belongs to Miss Dan'er."

Xiao Pan was stunned and exchanged a glance with an equally shocked Lu Gong. He laughed, "Fine! I approve."

The people of Qin are open-minded. Witnessing the public love declaration of Jing Jun, everyone's spirits rose greatly and cheered even louder. Their cheering sounds resonated throughout the plains.

The female warriors are laughing uncontrollably. Ying Ying and the other ladies forcefully pushed an embarrassed but thrilled Lu Dan'er to the front of the crowd so that she will not miss any part of the action.

Zhou Zihen still maintained his cool expression. He slowly glanced up at Lu Buwei who nodded slightly, indicating that he wants him to deal a heavy blow to Jing Jun and tarnish his reputation. He smiled to acknowledge this silent command. His eyes were shining like electricity as he shifted his gaze to Jing Jun who is putting on his armour and receiving his wooden sword.

Unexpectedly, Jing Jun made a monkey face, stared straight back at him and joked, "So Brother Zhou needs to seek Premier Lu's consent for every little thing."

Zhou Zihen was taken aback as he did not anticipate Jing Jun to see through their communication method. He plainly replied, "Assistant Commander Jing must be joking!"

Lord Changwen is personally helping Jing Jun to put on his armour. Overhearing their conversation, he lightly patted Jing Jun and advised, "Be careful!"

He led his men to the side of the duelling ground and left the two men standing there facing each other.

The crowd became silent as everyone watched with abated breaths, wondering how Jing Jun can counter Zhou Zihen's unorthodox fighting methods.

There may be ten thousand pairs of eyes staring at him and it will be a crucial fight but Jing Jun maintained his aloof expression and stared lazily at his opponent. His sword is still resting on his shoulder and he seems to disregard Zhou Zihen.

While everyone is anxious for him, the most anxious person is not Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi or any of the ladies. It is Lu Dan'er. She may be annoyed at him but now, her reputation is tied to the outcome of this battle. If Jing Jun loses, she will lose face too. Her palms became sweaty and she almost cannot continue watching the fight.

Out of the blue, both men began to move.

Originally, it was Zhou Zihen who moved first. But like it has been prearranged, the moment he made his move, Jing Jun's sword has left his shoulder and is now halfway through the air.

Zhou Zihen withdrew his sword and kicked out at the same time. Jing Jun somersaulted to the back and avoided his blow effortlessly.

Zhou Zihen was taken aback at this peculiar move. He is an experienced fighter and he knew that Jing Jun's strength lies in his agility. He dared not be complacent and instantly changed his battle tactics. He quickly rolled forward to where Jing Jun is about to land. When Jing Jun is landing, he will deal a heavy blow and break his legs.

The ever-changing fighting techniques have captivated everyone.

On the slope, Teng Yi smiled to Xiang Shaolong, "If Zhou Zihen is a few years younger, Jing Jun will be in trouble."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head slightly and focused hard on their fight without replying.

Jing Jun flipped twice in the air and actually has his hand embracing his legs against his chest. At the same time, his sword swished down at Zhou Zihen below him with lightning speed.

Zhou Zihen used his waist to prop himself up and flipped to the side. Using his backhand, he struck out with his short sword at chest area to hit Jing Jun's long sword.

Every one of their attacks was beyond comprehension and everyone was watching intently without any sounds.

Jing Jun knew that he is trying to deal a heavy blow to his long sword and use this opening to further attack him. He let

out a shrill cry and his leg kicked out towards Zhou Zihen's face forcefully.

Zhou Zihen is blown away by his agility and could not be bothered to attack his long sword anymore. He shifted his sword to attack his leg. At the same time, he took a step backwards to avoid the incoming kick.

Amazingly, Jing Jun has enough momentum to retract his kick and Zhou Zihen's sword hit empty air.

Everyone roared out in loud cheers and praises.

As Jing Jun landed, he rolled into a ball. Keeping the momentum, he rolled towards Zhou Zihen.

Zhou Zihen did not panic and roared. He adopted the horse stance and his sword exploded into a flurry of stances. Under the illumination of the torches, he maintains his steely expression and is truly an expert swordsman.

After all, he needs true talent to outshine the other eight thousand family warriors of Lu Buwei.

As impossible as it seems, Jing Jun leapt up from the ground and struck down at Zhou Zihen with his full body weight.

Ta! The wooden swords clashed.

Even with his solid horse stance, Zhou Zihen cannot withstand Jing Jun's heavy blow and staggered backwards.

Everyone forgot their inhibitions and shake their fists in the air, cheering loudly for him. The loudest cheers come from Lu Dan'er and the female warriors followed by the soldiers

from the Cavalry Army. Lu Buwei and his men's cheering were drowned by their voices.

Jing Jun fought ferociously. The moment he landed, he flipped forward with his long sword trailing and he followed up with another blow at Zhou Zihen.

Zhou Zihen is forced to defend himself and kept retreating. He cannot keep up with Jing Jun's flexible attacks that sometimes come from the air and sometimes when he was rolling on the ground. He has finally met his nemesis.

Under Jing Jun all out combo attacks, Zhou Zihen was panting as he tried to defend himself without the slightest chance to counter attack. Like a flower that has withered, he cannot salvage the situation.

Ta! Ta! Ta! Jing Jun made use of the advantage of his sword length to deliver three continuous blows to Zhou Zihen's short sword, causing him pain and numbness in his hands.

Everyone is siding Jing Jun in their cheers, causing Zhou Zihen to be mad and disappointed.

After another ten successive clashes, Zhou Zihen finally lost his grip on his sword and his sword flew out of his hands after receiving another heavy blow. As he groaned to himself, Jing Jun sidestepped to his back and delivered a back kick to his back.

Jing Jun's kick carried so much strength that Zhou Zihen can never block given his disadvantageous situation. Before he realised what happened, he has fallen flat on his face.

Lu Dan'er joyfully ran from the sidelines to Jing Jun's arms and they paid their respects to the boisterous crowd. No one is bothered with the defeated warrior leaving the duelling ground.

After a short discussion, Xu Xian happily asked, "Is Assistant Commander Jing ready for another challenger?"

Jing Jun respectfully answered, "I only fight on behalf of my Commander. I wish to end here while I am still the winner and have no desire to be kicked out by someone else!"

Everyone burst out laughing but no one blamed him for not accepting new challengers. Xu Xian smiled, "Assistant Commander Jing has done well. Have a good rest!"

Jing Jun paid his respects to the grandstand occupants and went back to the female warriors group with Lu Dan'er.

On the slope, Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi exchanged a smile. With Jing Jun's success, he will win the heart of Lu Dan'er sooner or later.

Teng Yi state in a deep voice, "It seems like Guan Zhongxie will not fight tonight. As long as he did not defeat you or Jing Jun, he is still not the best swordsman in the eyes of the people of Qin."

Xiang Shaolong nodded in agreement. He was interrupted by Wu Shu who came up behind them with a flustered look on his face. He anxiously reported, "The people of Qi have packed their luggage and are ready to go home."



Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were stunned. They looked at the grandstand and noticed that Lu Buwei and Tian Dan have indeed disappeared.

All of a sudden, they realised that they have been tricked by Mo Ao and Tian Dan.

Tian Dan's decision to leave Xianyang City tonight is exploiting Xiang Shaolong's greatest weakness.

Lu Buwei must have anticipated that he will chase after Tian Dan. This will ensure that the Wu Family Elite warriors leave Xianyang City together with him and when he dies of poisoning on the trip, Lu Buwei will not be implicated. After his death, he can even accuse him of neglecting his duties and take over the Wu Family assets. Lu Buwei the heartless man will stand to benefit with this course of events.

Ji Yanran and the other ladies will have to submit to him. What a devious plot!

Without Xiang Shaolong here to counter him, he will have lesser obstacles in pursuing his ambitions. When Guan Zhongxie is reinstated, he can promote him to be the Imperial Cavalry Commander as well. Everyone in Xianyang City will have to dance to his tune by then.

But how can he simply watch Tian Dan escape? Ever since Tian Dan tried to assassinate him, he has been keeping a low profile. He must be secretly planning this escape route. Thus, he must have been conspiring with Lu Buwei all along.

During his assassination, Lu Buwei swore that he did not have time to inform Tian Dan. It is all bullshit. In fact, he was the one who told Tian Dan to assassinate him.

This is called ‘inflicting injury on oneself to trick the enemy’. When everyone thinks that it is Lu Buwei’s enemy trying to kill him to get Lu Buwei into trouble, it was actually Lu Buwei who masterminded his assassination.

He has been too careless and was tricked by Lu Buwei. He even suspected Wang Wan or Cai Ze to be in cahoots with Tian Dan, which resulted in his oversight.

Teng Yi solemnly suggested, “Let me go after him! You must stay here to deal with Lu Buwei.”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, “Lu Buwei may not be able to send his own men to escort Tian Dan but Tian Dan has an army of four thousand men which matches the strength of our own army. After taking Lord Gaoling’s rebellion into consideration, I can only give you two thousand warriors. This makes both situations unfavourable for us. Don’t forget that Lu Buwei has eight thousand family warriors. Who knows what tricks are up their sleeves?”

Teng Yi kept quiet.

Xiang Shaolong whispered, “But there is still hope in this matter. I must persuade Prince Dan first. As long as he can try to delay Tian Dan’s journey, we can catch up to him. After all, An Gu has promised to make the Chu and Qi army retreat by ten miles away from the border.”

There are no more challengers going up the duelling grounds so amidst all the fanfare, Xu Xian announced the end of tonight's performances.

In the main tent of Yan, Prince Dan listened to Xiang Shaolong's explanation and hesitated, "It is inappropriate for us to act alone on this matter. In anything goes wrong, Qi and Chu will come after us. With the three allied states not providing any assistance, our state of Yan will be in peril!"

Xiang Shaolong plainly state, "Tian Dan's existence is the real danger to the state of Yan. I am not asking your men to fight Tian Dan openly but to create opportunities to disrupt his travelling once he leaves the Qin borders. As long as you can delay him for a few days, we will catch up to him."

Pausing, he strengthened his tone, "I will send my men to liaise with your general Xu Yiluan. At the time, the people of Wei and the Pass Commander General An Gu will also lend us a helping hand."

Listening in on the side, military advisor You Zhi advised, "This can be done. As long as we lay traps and conduct night raids, Tian Dan cannot tell whether his attackers are from Commander Xiang's forces or not. Even if Tian Dan manages to escape with his life, he will not be able to pin the blame on us."

Great General Xu Yize came in from outside and bellowed, "No one is stalking Commander Xiang."

Prince Dan was relieved and decided, "Fine! We will do our best to delay the meeting between Tian Dan and the two

armies of Qi and Chu. If we do not see Commander Xiang by the time they meet up, we shall have to let that traitor live for a few more years.”

Xiang Shaolong profusely gave his thanks. He secretly thought that everyone has their own secret weapons. Even with Mo Ao’s brilliance, he can never expect Xu Yiluan’s wandering army to come into the picture. After two days, his brilliant mind with cease to exist.

After he left Prince Dan’s tent, he glanced around him and saw that there are still burning torches everywhere. The young men and women of Qin are gathered in groups, singing, dancing and drinking to their heart’s content. It was a joyous time and no one wanted to go back to sleep.

On his way back to his tent, he was distracted by happy cheering of some young ladies. He looked in the direction of the sounds and saw a large purple flag about a hundred yards away from him and was reminded about Ying Ying’s appointment.

Will Ying Ying be waiting for him in the tent with the purple flower? There are still two hours until daybreak and she must be having a good time with Lu Dan’er and her female warriors.

After learning about Tian Dan’s departure, he was disillusioned and wanted to discuss with Teng Yi who they should send to liaise with Xu Yiluan to attack Tian Dan.

Somehow, he felt like paying a quick visit to Ying Ying’s tent!

Thinking about this, he made use of the shadows of the tents and slipped towards Ying Ying's tent. He hoped to speak to her privately. Otherwise, if he gets intertwined by the female warriors, he will be stuck there for hours.

As most of the people are gathered around the assembly grounds, the tents were not well-illuminated. Without much difficulty, Xiang Shaolong managed to find his way around the tents without anyone detecting his presence

On an open area, he saw ten odd campfires. Enjoying themselves around the campfire were Lu Dan'er and over a hundred female warriors. They were accompanied by over two hundred young men and they are having a good time singing, clapping, dancing and flirting. Ying Ying was surprisingly absent.

Xiang Shaolong sighed, thinking that he may want to skip the appointment. As he stepped backwards, he saw a light coming from a tent behind him and there were some sounds coming from it.

Xiang Shaolong took a closer look and discovered that there was a large purple flower sewn on the tent door which looked exactly like the one on the flag.

Pleased, Xiang Shaolong walked over and was about to call her name. He changed his mind and since he wanted to win her heart, he will sneak into her tent and give her a surprise. She is an open-minded girl who is used to surprising others so she should not mind. He can then make love to her and win her affections without waiting till daybreak.

Aroused, he stepped into the tent.

A large figure which was prone on the floor leapt up swiftly and viciously howled, "Who is it?"

As Xiang Shaolong faced this person, both of them were equally shocked. Under the illumination of the lamp, it was a naked Guan Zhongxie.

Guan Zhongxie saw that it was him and a murderous look flashed across his eyes. He moved to one side and began to put on his clothes.

Xiang Shaolong looked down and saw horrified Ying Ying sitting up under the cover of a blanket. Her face was deathly white and she stared at him with a lost expression. Beyond the blanket, her jade white legs can be seen.

In his wildest dreams, Xiang Shaolong did not expect that they will be making out in the tent. He bitterly laughed, "My apologies!" and left the tent.

After he took several steps, Guan Zhongxie chased up to him and apologised, "Official Xiang. I am sorry. She said she is meeting you at daybreak and did not expect you to come so early."

Xiang Shaolong is certain that he purposely seduced Ying Ying to sow discord between them and hated Ying Ying for being unable to resist him. He accepted his defeat and forced a smile, "It is my fault for spoiling Official Guan's happy moment and even gave you a fright."

Guan Zhongxie was astounded, “Hasn’t Official Xiang seen Premier Lu? Earlier, he sent someone to look for you.”

Xiang Shaolong casually responded, “I am walking everywhere aimlessly and I am afraid his men have not been able to locate me yet.”

Walking besides him, Guan Zhongxie whispered, “The ladies of Qin are very open minded even before marriage. I hope Official Xiang does not take it to heart!”

Xiang Shaolong thought that with these words, Guan Zhongxie is ridiculing Xiang Shaolong should he ever have the courage to wed Ying Ying. He pretended to be unaffected and laughed, “Official Guan must be joking.”

Pleased, Guan Zhongxie recommended, “Let’s visit Premier Lu together!”

Xiang Shaolong is at a loss.

All along, he has been at the losing end because unlike his enemies, he did not resort to unscrupulous methods to achieve his goals.

He is a man of principles and values relationships. If he carries on like this, even with Mo Ao dead, he may still die in the hands of Guan Zhongxie.

It is time to change strategies.

## CHAPTER 9

## Blessing In Disguise

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHEN Xiang Shaolong and Guan Zhongxie arrived at Lu Buwei's tent, he was seated outside the tent and enjoying the singing of two stunning courtesans. With him are Mo Ao, Lu Chan and ten over escorts. Zhou Zihen and Lu Nianrong are not around.

Lu Buwei pretended to be happy to see him and instructed Xiang Shaolong to sit beside him. For the first time, he introduced Mo Ao and Lu Chan to him.



As Xiang Shaolong exchanged some meaningless conversation with Mo Ao and Lu Chan, Lu Buwei dismissed the courtesans and leaned towards him, revealing, "Tian Dan is leaving tonight. What does Shaolong plan to do? If you want to go after him, I will fully support you. He actually tried to harm me by trying to assassinate you. I will not protect him anymore."

Everyone stared at Xiang Shaolong, waiting for his reaction. Xiang Shaolong felt like he is an animal being surrounded by tigers and wolves.

They must be laughing inside that he is still ignorant about being poisoned by them.

Thoughts raced through his mind at the speed of light. If he decides to give up his decision to pursue Tian Dan, Mo Ao may be suspicious and deduced that he has a secret plan. But it would be ridiculous for him to chase after Tian Dan now. He was in a dilemma.

Recalling his determination to 'achieve his goals at all costs', he acted awkward and divulged, "Actually, I wanted to kill Tian Dan because he killed a female friend that I got to know in Handan City. It turned out to be a misunderstanding as I received a letter from her yesterday. I am not really out to kill him but just wanted to scare him. This fellow has always been trying to kill me and it is lucky that he has failed in all his attempts."

It is a complete lie to prevent Lu Buwei from forcing him to pursue Tian Dan and also give him an excuse not to pursue

him himself. Fortunately, Tian Dan has left and there is no one to validate his words.

Lu Buwei, Mo Ao, Guan Zhongxie and Lu Chan all have a strange expression on their faces after hearing his words. After they exchanged glances, Guan Zhongxie began, "Why did Official Xiang think that the lady has been killed?"

From his words, Xiang Shaolong deduced that Tian Dan did not tell them the full details. He was secretly delighted and told them about the weak-looking eyes in the painting compared to Shan Rou's usual energetic eyes. He bitterly laughed, "I may have been too rash and concluded too early that she was killed without further thinking. When I received her letter yesterday, I realised that it was a complete misunderstanding. She did try to assassinate Tian Dan but managed to escape with her life. Naturally, I will not tell these things to Tian Dan!"

Lu Buwei shook his head and sighed, "We already know it is a misunderstanding. In actual fact, Tian Dan was puzzled that you concluded that she was dead based on the painting. He saw that you were furious and did not clarify things with you."

Mo Ao cut in, "The painting is drawn by one of Tian Dan's artist from his memory. It is not unusual to draw the eyes incorrectly due to the short interaction."

Now, it is Xiang Shaolong who trembled strongly and he exclaimed, "What?!"

As everyone is staring at him with astonishment, he tried to cover up and asked, "Since Premier Lu knows about this, why didn't you tell me earlier?"

He tried to suppress his emotions so that his joy will not show up on his face.

Heavens!

So Shan Rou is really not dead. It is really a misunderstanding.

Lu Buwei leisurely replied, "I thought Tian Dan is spouting nonsense and is trying to use me to scare you so I did not bring it up. Now, we have proven that he has been lying all along."

Xiang Shaolong acknowledged that it made sense. But under those circumstances, there is no need for Tian Dan to lie to Lu Buwei. Moreover, it is not Tian Dan's style to showcase his weaknesses. Thus, there is a high probability that Shan Rou is indeed alive.

Lu Buwei saw that he cannot persuade Xiang Shaolong to pursue Tian Dan and disappointment is written all over his face. He stood up and asked, "Shaolong! Will you visit Niangrong in her tent? You may be able to persuade her to change her mind."

Xiang Shaolong is not in the mood to see Lu Niangrong at all. He stood up together with Mo Ao and the rest and replied, "There is an early morning hunt tomorrow. Let Third

Mistress have a good rest! I will see her again when she is feeling better tomorrow.”

It may be due to his failure to cajole him that Lu Buwei is in a terrible mood. He did not hold him back and allowed him to leave.

Xiang Shaolong returned to the Cavalry Camp near the Royal tents and saw Teng Yi, Jing Jun and Liu Chao in the middle of a secret discussion.

He pulled Teng Yi to one side first and told him about Shan Rou’s likelihood of being alive.

Teng Yi was mad with joy. He then frowned, “Then are we still going after Tian Dan?”

Xiang Shaolong resolutely decided, “We must kill him to avenge the injustice done to the Shan Family. Moreover, Tian Dan has tried to kill me several times and is in cahoots with Lu Buwei. It is time to eliminate this threat once and for all! This present opportunity is once in a lifetime chance to kill him. If we missed it, it will be gone for good. No matter what, we must never allow him to return to Qi alive.”

He added with a smile, “Moreover, I made a vow that day to change my name to Long Shao Xiang if I did not kill him. It is such an ugly sounding name!”

Teng Yi broke out into a smile and waved Jing Jun and Liu Chao to join them. He instructed Liu Chao, “Go ahead and explain your findings.”

Liu Chao reported, "We have discovered Lord Gaoling's men building rafts secretly at the river upstream and are collecting large quantities of firewood and dried grass. I am sure that they are preparing to burn the bridges."

Jing Jun added, "If they build shelves on the rafts and spray the entire raft with oil, it is tantamount to a live volcano speeding down the river towards us. Its destructive impact will be tremendous. Shall we attack them first to prevent this from happening?"

Xiang Shaolong explained, "This time round, we need to put up a show to allow the Crown Prince to show off his godly ability in leading an army to war. We must project a favourable image of him in the hearts and minds of the people of Qin. This is called Branding. Only through this can we prolong our fight with Lu Buwei until the day he is coroneted."

Teng Yi smiled, "You use really funny terms such as Godly Ability and Branding. But it does make sense to me."

Jing Jun excitedly said, "I understand. We need to find out about the enemies' schemes and plan a full counterattack strategy. The Crown Prince will issue military orders while pretending that this is a new encounter. Thus, he can convince everyone of his talent."

Liu Chao mused, "So we must not only win but win beautifully."

Knowing that Shan Rou is still alive, Xiang Shaolong is in great spirits. "That's right!" he laughed.

He continued to praise, "We must win beautifully just like how Jing Jun beat Zhou Zihen beautifully."

Jing Jun gave his thanks and shone with pride.

Teng Yi joked, "Have you gotten Lu Dan'er's red flower?"

Jing Jun was agonized, "She is a tough one. She allowed me to hug and caress her but still refrain from letting me pass this final barrier."

Liu Chao is experienced with women and gleefully joked, "I think Master Jing is lacking in experience and may have made a few wrong moves."

Jing Jun laughingly scolded, "Damn you. Do you think this is my first girl? My moves are always the best. Unfortunately, there is no way we can prove this by duelling. Hng! You are mistaken."

The other three men broke out into laughter.

Xiang Shaolong laughed as he agreed that no man will ever say that he is bad at chasing girls.

After knowing that Shan Rou is alive, Teng Yi is in an excellent mood. He remembered something and reminded, "Yanran and the girls are in the royal tents accompanying Widow Qin. Tingfang wants you to fetch them before returning back to your tent."

Jing Jun smiled, "Third Brother had better spend more time with sisters-in-law. Leave these tasks to us!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled as he chided him. Summoning the Eighteen Guardians, he rode towards the royal tents.

After entering the wooden gates, he ran into Xu Xian who is escorted by several men carrying torches. Together, they rode to one of the slopes to speak in secret.

Below them, tents were pitched everywhere on the plains. Despite the loud gushing sounds of River Jing, laughter and cheering can still be heard as there are still many people who have not retired to bed.

Xu Xian whispered, "For the past two days, Lord Gaoling has been trying to persuade me and Lu Gong to work join forces with him against Lu Buwei. He swore that he has no intention to usurp the throne but only wanted to force this outsider out of the Qin court."

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Lord Gaoling can never return from this path that he is taking. Lu Buwei has spies around him and he is still ignorant about it. Based on this point, he will only suffer in the hands of Lu Buwei."

Xu Xian reminded, "I am puzzled that Du Bi chose to leave Xianyang City during such a crucial juncture. I guessed he knew about Lord Gaoling's rebellion and purposely left so that he can watch us from the sidelines. This man is extremely scheming and is much more talented than Lord Gaoling."

He added, "Is Shaolong really confident? Don't forget that Lu Buwei will create some internal chaos."

Xiang Shaolong confidently explained, "The Crown Prince will lead the fight personally and Lu Buwei will have no chance to interfere."

Xu Xian frowned, "The Crown Prince is still young and lack battle experience. I am concerned..."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "Crown Prince only needs to know how to delegate his work to the correct persons."

Xu Xian saw through him and laughed, "Let's make it a practice round for him! When that happens, Lu Gong and I will stand on his left and right, showing everyone that he has our full support. Shaolong must plan everything well."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head joyfully.

Xu Xian praised, "Your fifth brother is highly-skilled and clever, undermining Lu Buwei's reputation. He is a rare talent whom Lu Gong and I admire very much. Right! Have you decided to give up your plan to kill Tian Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong cannot reveal his relationship with Prince Dan. He replied, "I have asked the people of Wei to help me to delay his travelling speed. If they can hold him back a few days, I am sure I can catch up to him. When I am gone, Jing Jun will be in charge of the Cavalry Army. Please help me take care of him."

Xu Xian was stunned, "Why would the people of Wei help you?"

Xiang Shaolong answered, "Except for Chu, the other states have some form of enmity with Tian Dan. Moreover, I was



the one who freed the Crown Prince of Wei. Lord Longyang will surely lend me a helping hand in return.”

Xu Xian was satisfied with his answer and patted his shoulder to show his appreciation. They then parted.

At the defending gates, the door attendant informed him that Xiao Pan is looking for him. He went to look for Xiao Pan first.

Xiao Pan is in a secret discussion with Li Si and has a happy expression on his face. The moment he saw Xiang Shaolong enter his tent, he waved him over and together, they analyzed a map on the table. It was a map of the entire campsite. Lord Gaoling’s tents were marked in red.

Xiang Shaolong understood his excitement and is happy for him. It is a rare chance for him to command the Qin army and show his prowess.

Xiao Pan began, “Earlier, I have summoned Subject Jing (Jun) and he has told me the location of the rebel soldiers. I am now discussing a counter strategy with Subject Li. Subject Li, why don’t you explain first!”

Li Si is about to speak out when Xiang Shaolong kicked him lightly under the table. Li Si understood his meaning and reported, “I only contributed a small part and the majority of the plan was crafted by Crown Prince. Why don’t Crown Prince explain it instead?”

Xiao Pan was thrilled and smiled, “For Lord Gaoling to succeed, he must use unconventional methods and take us

by surprise. With so much information about their plans, we must annihilate them or my study of military books would be in waste!”

He pointed to River Jing and detailed, “If I am Lord Gaoling, I will first make use of the natural surroundings to my advantage. For example, I can create dams and store water from the nearby rivers that connect with River Jing. When it is time to attack, I will open the dams and let the huge amounts of water flow downstream. The torrents will tear the bridges apart and with a timely attack, I can achieve victory.”

Xiang Shaolong was shocked. When Liu Chao mentioned he saw rafts being built, they can be used for building dams too. A water attack is even more powerful than a fire attack and there is no way they can prevent flooding. He could not help but turn to look at Li Si.

Li Si clarified, “I have nothing to do with this. This is really Crown Prince’s idea.”

Xiao Pan proudly continued, “Subject Li guessed that they will use a fire attack but I felt that a water attack is more powerful. If they add a few logs on the water, all kinds of bridges will be destroyed. Then, they only need to shoot some fire arrows and our whole camp will be burnt to the ground.”

Xiang Shaolong was amazed at Xiao Pan’s intelligence. This is truly the first time he is fighting a war based on his own abilities.

Xiao Pan proceeded to explain the different scenarios where Lord Gaoling can send in his attackers and how Lu Buwei can try to kill his opponents using different strategies. His explanations made sense and both Xiang Shaolong and Li Si were completely blown away by his intricate thinking and rational explanations.

Finally, Xiao Pan bitterly smiled, "My biggest flaw is that I have too many scenarios with their own strengths and weaknesses. I have no idea which is the best plan. Will my two subjects please advise me?"

Xiang Shaolong could not hold back and laughed, "The most powerful attack is the attack that always changes to suit the changing battle conditions. Crown Prince can rest at ease. When we know their attacking time, we will attack first and annihilate all of them before Lu Buwei even know what is going on. Leave this to the Changping brothers and myself. Then, Crown Prince only needs to issue the orders and we will put up a good show for everyone."

Xiao Pan slapped the table and sighed, "Only Grand Tutor and Subject Li understands me. We shall do as you say!"

Li Si respectfully added, "Official Xiang and I will bring you the latest battle reports so that you can make the necessary changes."

Pleased, Xiao Pan nodded his head. Changing the subject, he asked, "Grand Tutor's Fifth Brother Jing Jun is a rare talent. He is skilful, loyal and honest. I admire men like him. Can

Grand Tutor Xiang give any suggestions on how I may reward him?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "His official post is already quite high and still lacks real experience. We must let him hone his skills further before we promote him again."

Xiao Pan smiled, "Is he really interested in Lu Dan'er? If Lu Gong does not object, I will see to their marriage. After all, it is better for her this way than to land in the hands of Guan Zhongxie the traitor."

Xiang Shaolong recollected the ugly expression on Guan Zhongxie's face as he leapt up from a naked Ying Ying. He felt like there were needles pricking his heart. He nodded, "I have to bother Crown Prince."

Xiao Pan gladly assured, "It is my pleasure. For the time being, I am not interested in marriage as there are too many important things to do."

When he left Xiao Pan's tent, he ran into Lord Changwen and was detained by him and dragged to a corner. He cheered, "My sister is no longer hostile towards you. You must grasp the opportunity and win her heart. If you marry her, you will be relieving us of a big burden."

Xiang Shaolong was very uncomfortable. Luckily, he was not deeply intertwined with Ying Ying yet or it will be a heavy blow to him. He remembered the one night stands in the 21st century and realised that what Ying Ying is not that atrocious after all. Both males and females have the right to

sleep around. The question is that in this case, it is Guan Zhongxie purposely out to seduce Ying Ying from him.

To Lord Changwen, he bitterly smiled, "I have lost. Can we stop talking about this?"

Lord Changwen was astounded. "Guan Zhongxie?" he stammered.

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head slightly and patted his shoulder apologetically before he took his leave.

Qin Qing's tent is located behind the main royal tent and is beside Zhu Ji's tent. Here, there are ten odd tents which all belonged to the females of the royal family. Wooden walls are erected between these tents and the other tents and security is very tight.

Xiang Shaolong may have the authority to go wherever he wishes but he still respects their rules and announced his arrival to a palace guard. Soon, one of Qin Qing's personal maids came to report that Ji Yanran and the ladies have left and Qin Qing has retired for the night.

Xiang Shaolong understood that Qin Qing does not want to see him given the present circumstances. He shrugged his shoulders and left.

## CHAPTER 10

## Killing Four Birds With Two Arrows

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BEFORE dawn, Xiang Shaolong is roused from sleep by the Tian sisters.

He did not sleep a wink the night before and was working non-stop yesterday. He was so exhausted he slept like a log the moment he hugged Wu Tingfang in bed.

Outside the tent where it is still dark, Ji Yanran and his other two wives changed the medication on his wound. By now, the injury is almost completely healed except for a scar. He

already has several scars on his body and an additional one is inconsequential.

This moment, Jing Jun led a young man to see him and introduced, "This is Huan Qi. Commander Xiang should have seen him yesterday. He is the best hunter from the first hunt yesterday and the only fighter to win three consecutive fights last night. The Crown Prince has promoted him to be a Major and assigned him to our Cavalry Army. Commander Xiang will be in charge of grooming him."

Huan Qi kneeled down and greeted, "Huan Qi pays his respects to Commander Xiang."

'No wonder he looked so familiar', Xiang Shaolong thought. He gently instructed, "Stand up!"

Like an agile leopard, Huan Qi sprang up from his kneeling position.

Xiang Shaolong saw that he has clear and shining eyes, a confident aura and a well-built body. He was tall, muscular and has an imposing air. Even with the three pretty wives besides himself, he did not stray his eyes to look at them. Pleased, he inquired, "Huan Qi, what is your background and do you have any military experience?"

Without hesitation, Huan Qi replied, "I come from the North and spend my youth studying martial arts and military warfare. I was a Captain serving General Wang Jian in the north as he protected our borders."

With a sincere expression, he awkwardly revealed, "It is General Wang Jian who sent me to represent the Border Guards in the hunting fair. General Wang advised me to seek out Commander Xiang should I ever get the chance to be promoted as Commander Xiang will be the right person who can groom me."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "Based on Brother Huan's talent, it will be hard to keep you from excelling."

Huan Qi's face darkened slightly and he continued, "There is something Commander Xiang must know. My ancestors are from the Quanrong tribe. Thus, regardless of my achievements, I have always been overlooked when it is promotion time. If not for General Wang's support, I will still be a miserable sergeant. General Wang has the intention to promote me to become a Major but his recommendations are rejected by the military headquarters. Therefore, General Wang sent me here to try my luck and instructed me to work for Commander Xiang at all costs."

Xiang Shaolong came to realise that racism exists even within the people of Qin. He was thrilled. If Wang Jian recognizes this man to be talented, there is surely some substance in him. Additionally, Wang Jian must have learnt about his situation from Big Brother Wu Zhuo and as a result, he sent this capable man to assist himself.

Now that his leg has been bandaged properly, he stood up and grabbed his shoulder, swearing, "Brother Huan can rest at ease. I will never have a different opinion about you



because of your ancestry. As long as you work hard and stay loyal to the state, I will see that you get what you deserved. From today onwards, you will be my Assistant Commander and I will issue you your letter of appointment within these two days.”

Huan Qi was stunned at Xiang Shaolong’s generosity and gratefully kneeled down and kowtowed.

Jing Jun held him up and smiled to Xiang Shaolong, “The moment I saw Brother Huan, we hit it off very well. I already told him that Commander Xiang will take good care of anyone recommended by General Wang Jian.”

Xiang Shaolong officially state, “Little Jun should not speak like that. I have absolute trust in General Wang’s judgement and moreover, Brother Huan did perform well at the hunting fair. That is why I gave him a chance to showcase his talent.”

Jing Jun winked at Xiang Shaolong, asking, “What should be his duties over the next two days?”

Xiang Shaolong understood what he meant. Jing Jun was asking whether he can tell Huan Qi about Lord Gaoling and Lu Buwei’s issues. After a short contemplation, he acknowledged that it is someone that Wang Jian sent to assist him and should be reliable. He hardened his heart and replied, “Since he is one of us, I see no reason to hide anything from him. Only when he has complete knowledge can he do his best.”

Huan Qi is so touched that he nearly cried. Jing Jun happily dragged him to see Teng Yi.

Ji Yanran came to Xiang Shaolong's side and predicted, "If Yanran is not mistaken, another capable General is about to surface in Qin."

Different hunting groups led their hunting dogs to cross the wooden bridges over River Jing. They then spread out into the wide hunting grounds to begin the morning hunt.

Lu Buwei, Xu Xian, Wang He, Lu Gong, Wang Wan, Cai Ze, Xiang Shaolong, Lord Changping, Guan Zhongxie and other important officials are accompanying Xiao Pan on his hunt.

Zhu Ji is only interested in the first hunt.

Lord Changwen and Teng Yi are in charge of protecting the campsite while Jing Jun and Huan Qi went to spy on Lord Gaoling's rebel soldiers.

There is another hunting party made up of members of the royal family which includes Lord Gaoling and his escorts. Qin Qing, Ji Yanran, Wu Tingfang, Zhao Zhi and the Tian sisters formed another group while Prince Dan and his men formed another group. They were spread out among the other groups on the hunting grounds.

Xiao Pan rode his horse towards a huge lake and was in great spirits.

Xiang Shaolong, Guan Zhongxie and Lord Changping followed him closely. Behind them are the rest of the officials.

Xiang Shaolong saw that Xiao Pan is slowly growing up to be a young man and assessed his extraordinary features and aura.

His most remarkable features are his two high and round cheekbones, making one feel subservient. It may be due to the numerous secrets that he is hiding that his eyes are becoming more and more mysterious looking. When he is looking straight at you, even Xiang Shaolong who is so familiar with him will feel his goose pimples standing. His lips are thick which does not make him handsome but his mouth is well-defined which gives people a sense of determination and resolution. As a result, his appearance is very different from other people and he does have a dominating aura around him.

As he continue to grow older, these attributes become more and more significant. Xiang Shaolong can no longer see any signs of the childish Xiao Pan he saw back in Handan Palace.

This future Qin Shihuang shares a common height but he has wide shoulders and his hands and feet are bigger than most people. When he moves, he carries an aura of might and invincibility. If there are any fortune tellers, they can easily tell that he is of noble birth.

At this point, there is a flock of water eagles that began to fly into the sky from the lakeside. Xiao Pan shot an arrow but only hit empty air. Xiao Pan laughed, "So many birds! Someone shoot them down."

Xiang Shaolong is not interested in these aimless killings and he watched as the other men began to shoot arrow after arrow.

Qiang! Xiang Shaolong eardrums resonated with a loud sound. Beside him, Guan Zhongxie took out his iron bow and rushed in front of everyone, shooting two arrows in succession. However, the bow only rang out once, showing his incredible firing speed.

Over a hundred arrows flew through the air.

The water eagles cry out tragically and twenty odd birds fell down from the sky.

The escorts quickly released the hunting dogs to bring the birds back. The loud barking of the dogs shattered the tranquillity of the plains.

Xiao Pan was ecstatic and rode towards the lakeside. Everyone has to follow him in his pursuit.

Xiao Pan finally stopped on a little hill that overlooks the entire lake.

As everyone stopped behind him, Lu Buwei rode up to his side and laughed, "The Crown Prince has good horsemanship!"

Prince Dan and his men arrived at the hill around the same time.

Xiao Pan smiled, "Thanks for your compliment. Look, our Qin has such beautiful scenery with large plains and abundant animals."

He pointed to the west mountains and continued, "Can every one of you see the famous western waterfall? It falls down from a height of a few hundred feet down and resembles a brocade of white silk. I can imagine that when the water finally land on the rocks below, the water will splash with a tremendous impact and become thousands of shimmering water drops."

Behind him, Xiang Shaolong glanced around the wilderness with interest. It is like a scene from a beautiful dream with the lake in front of them and the mountains in the background. The green vegetation and the mountains are stack in their natural layers, resembling a landscape painting. Although Xiao Pan is still a teenager, he is fully immersed in his role as the King of Qin. He is analyzing his territory with pride and joy.

Lu Gong came to the other side of Xiao Pan and described, "I often go there to hunt myself. When the waterfall finally reaches the bottom, it flows to the east and take a turn, running through two mountains and valleys. Finally, it will run in the southwest direction and form the west river. After another ten miles, it will merge with the Jing River. It is a spectacular sight to behold."

Xiang Shaolong scanned everyone's expression and saw that everyone was intoxicated in their emotions. Only Prince Dan

is eyeing Xiao Pan with suspicions. He was shaken and thought about Jing Ke's assassination. He secretly believed that this is the time when Prince Dan is beginning to harbour thoughts about assassinating Xiao Pan.

Xiao Pan resolutely declared, "That shall be our goal for today. If I do not witness the splendour of the western waterfall personally, I will not be able to go to sleep tonight."

Xu Xian smiled, "If this is the case, we must set off now. It will take us six hours to go there and come back."

They were interrupted by the escorts and the hunting dogs who came back with the water eagles. In total, there were a total of twenty-seven birds that were shot down. The arrows are marked with names so everyone can tell who shot the most number of birds. There are two arrows that went through two eagles each. It is truly killing two birds with one arrow.

The birds are displayed on the floor for everyone's assessment.

Xiang Shaolong saw that the two arrows that killed the four birds are similar. Shocked, he stared at Guan Zhongxie.

Everyone is starting to notice the two special arrows.

Xiao Pan was astounded, "May I know who it is that possessed such amazing archery skill?"

Guan Zhongxie leapt down his horse and knelt down, reporting, "Crown Prince, please do not mind my lowly skill."

Lu Gong and Xu Xian exchanged a look and they have a concerned expression on their faces.

It is already very challenging to fire two arrows at the same time. It takes even more skill to shoot down four eagles with only two arrows. Among the hundred odd flying eagles, one must aim both arrows concurrently so as to score two kills each. It is a feat that cannot be topped.

Xiang Shaolong can feel his whole body turning cold. If they happened to duel, he would be unable to avoid his powerful arrows. Looks like Guan Zhongxie is superior to Teng Yi in both arm strength and archery skill.

Xiao Pan tried to hide his unnatural expression and forced a smile, "Subject Guan's archery skill is peerless. I want to reward you. What suggestions do the rest of you have?"

Lu Buwei will not let this chance slip by. He smiled, "If Crown Prince can reinstate him to his former position, it will be good enough."

Xiao Pan had agreed to this matter earlier when Empress had spoken to him about it. She wanted to support Lu Buwei and curb his ambitions. Xiao Pan nodded, "From this moment on, Subject Guan will resume his former duties and assist me in protecting Xianyang City."

Guan Zhongxie hurriedly kowtowed with thanks.

Xiao Pan pointed his horse whip to the western mountains and exclaimed, "Let's race there!"

Leading the group of riders, he sped down the slope.

Short after noon time, Xiao Pan and his followers came back with their mission accomplished.

Back at the camp, Xiang Shaolong had some free time and went to find Li Si. He told Li Si about Huan Qi's appointment and Li Si agreed wholeheartedly. Other than him, there is no one who knows how close Xiao Pan and Xiang Shaolong are.

Xiang Shaolong was amused.

When he came to this ancient world through the time machine, he did his best to locate Qin Shihuang in Handan City so that he can gain his friendship and enjoy a life of luxury. After so many twists and turns, he became the one who 'invented' Qin Shihuang. There is no other miracle bigger than this in the past or in the future.

Wu Tingfang and Zhao Zhi came up to him and were chirping non-stop like two little birds. They told him about the interesting stories during their own hunt and Xiang Shaolong praised them for their abilities. By now, Qin Qing, Ji Yanran and the Tian sisters have joined them.

While they were busy talking, the hunting groups are slowly returning back to camp.

At the main assembly ground, everyone is occupied with reporting their catch and inspecting the animals. Wu Tingfang and Zhao Zhi hurriedly joined in the fun.

Ji Yanran is very observant and told Xiang Shaolong, "Little Jun is back and is chatting with Lu Dan'er besides the assembly ground. Hubby, you can spend more time with



Sister Fang and Zhi Zhi. I wish to take a nap back at our tent. When I wake up, let's go for a shower in the river!"

Xiang Shaolong knew that she has a habit of taking afternoon naps and consented.

After Ji Yanran left with Qin Qing and the Tian sisters, Xiang Shaolong jumped down his horse and instructed Wu Shu to bring his horse back to camp first. He finally saw Jing Jun with Lu Dan'er. Jing Jun appears to be saying some teasing words and Lu Dan'er is raining blows on him. Jing Jun turned around and allowed Lu Dan'er to hit his back. After a short while, her blows softened and nearby, the female warriors are laughing at them.

Xiang Shaolong is happy for them. "Commander Xiang!" Huan Qi came up to him.

Xiang Shaolong turned his head and smiled, "Brother Huan, why didn't you join Little Jun in having fun? Based on your talents, you should be highly regarded by the female warriors."

Huan Qi paid his respects and answered, "This is the time for me to contribute to my country and I am not interested in women or family planning. Hei! Commander Xiang can just call me Huan Qi."

Xiang Shaolong reckoned this the difference between him and Jing Jun. One of them is a dedicated worker while the other is all out to enjoy life. He smiled, "How young are you?"

Huan Qi respectfully responded, "I am nineteen."

Xiang Shaolong decided, "You are only one year older than Little Jun. I shall call you Little Qi!"

He led him away from the assembly ground towards a secluded spot, enquiring, "Any new discoveries today?"

Huan Qi detailed, "Assistant Commander Jing and I went deep into the mountains to spy on the enemy. The weather has been good for the past few days and there is no fog. Thus, we can see everything very clearly. From what I observed, there is about ten thousand rebel soldiers but they are disunited and in disarray. Their formation is untidy; their banners are in a mess; they have tired looks on their faces; they dragged their feet wherever they go and their morale is very low. I only need one thousand elite soldiers to attack and overpower them."

Xiang Shaolong was blown away, "How can Little Qi make so many conclusions with just half a day of spying?"

Like a different person altogether, Huan Qi explained, "Before a battle, it is important to observe the enemies' activities from higher ground. From the small details, we can draw important conclusions about their strength and strategies. Lord Gaoling's men may be hidden in the dense forests but we can still observe which areas of the forest are populated with birds and beasts and which areas are void of them. From there, we can gauge the size of their camp and the number of men they have. We can proceed to look at the ground for clues. From the rising dust, I am sure that

they are cutting trees and accumulating rocks to be used to attack us later.”

The more he spoke, the more enthusiastic he became. Squatting on the floor, he used some stones to display the enemies’ formation. He was extremely detailed and left nothing out, showing his extraordinary memory and observation skills.

Xiang Shaolong was moved, “If I give you a group of two thousand elite soldiers, what will you do? You must remember that you can only attack them after they have made the first move.”

Huan Qi stood up and used his leg to destroy the stone formations on the ground. He seriously state, “Besides knowing the food supplies and strength of the enemy, the most important thing is the motivation behind their fighting spirit. If we manage to convince them that their fight is meaningless, we will defeat them without losing a single soldier. Now, our enemy is inconvenienced by the river so their communication is hindered. They are based in the uncomfortable wet areas of the forest where there are many thorny plants. I am confident that they are ill-prepared which caused the soldiers to be exhausted and their morale to be low. We can attack them from the river and on land simultaneously. Even if they manage to destroy the bridges, there is no loss to us. We can fortify ourselves along the river and remain undefeated.”

Xiang Shaolong could not help but improve his opinion about him. Jing Jun may have other strengths which he cannot match but in terms of wisdom and military warfare, Jing Jun lags far behind him.

If these words come from Lu Gong or Xu Xian, it is to be expected. But Huan Qi is only nineteen and has such capabilities. There is only one word that can describe him, Genius.

Xiang Shaolong had a brainwave, "Let me bring you to see someone. When you see him, you must tell him everything you told me earlier. It will benefit your career in the future."

Huan Qi was astonished, "Who are you bringing me to see?"

Xiang Shaolong clapped his shoulder and pushed him towards the royal tents, laughing, "Of course to see the Crown Prince!"

Huan Qi trembled and halted. He lowered his head and muttered, "Why don't I tell you my ideas and you can report them to the Crown Prince?"

Xiang Shaolong continued to nudge him forward and smiled, "That would be wrong as I don't deserve the credit for your work. Stop hesitating. I like men who are easy-going."

Huan Qi is so touched his eyes start to redden. He sobbed, "No wonder General Wang always say Commander Xiang is the most generous man and the number one hero of our Qin Empire. I will never forget your kindness."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "It is what you truly deserve. I am just the introducer. But you must remember that this round, we must make the Crown Prince show off his might in front of his people. We must not take any credit for ourselves. Understand?"

Huan Qi naturally understood and hurriedly nodded his head.

## CHAPTER 11

## The Special Elite Forces

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

XIANG SHAOLONG left Huan Qi in the royal tent with Xiao Pan and Li Si before he rushed back to the assembly ground to fetch his two alluring wives. He was too late and they had left already. When he was about to leave himself, Ying Ying appeared from the crowd and held onto his sleeve, dragging him to a spot near the river.

Xiang Shaolong noticed that her expression was forlorn and is certain that she is feeling terrible inside. Therefore, she did not exhibit her usual stubborn characteristics.

Ying Ying did not say a single word until they reached a little wood near the river. She released him from her grip and turned around with her back facing him, whining, "I know that you must despise me now and regard me as a wanton woman."

Xiang Shaolong walked up to her and held her firm shoulders, turning her around slowly. Pressing her against a tree, he scanned her pretty face and saw large drops of tears flowing down her face. He smiled and use his sleeve to wipe her tears, coaxing, "Why would I despise you? Men can sleep around and so can women. Moreover, you are still a single girl. Didn't you say that you are more capable than men in all areas? Why are you so despondent now?"

Ying Ying was in a daze, "You really forgive me?"

Xiang Shaolong casually shrugged his shoulders, "It is human nature to react to seduction. When you are emotional, anything can happen. If you are really in love with Guan Zhongxie, I will give both of you my blessings and will not cause any trouble for you."

These are his true and sincere thoughts. When he was still in the 21st Century, he knew many women who have multiple partners and he himself was one of their partners. Now, it is similar to the attitude of the Qin ladies so he need not take it too seriously. Although he did feel uncomfortable at the beginning, it is just a natural reaction. After some time, it did not really matter.

Some colour returned to Ying Ying's face and she lowered her head, confessing, "Last night, I was only waiting for you. Somehow, he showed up and I succumbed to his seduction. I am really sorry. You are really willing to forgive me?"

If he can choose, Xiang Shaolong would not want to get involved in any new relationships. But to counter Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie, he must win Ying Ying's heart no matter what happens. Moreover, he is not bothered about her personal life. Leaning forward and smelling her fragrance, he assured, "I still prefer your stubborn attitude. That is the real you."

Ying Ying sighed, "But I still feel that I committed a wrongdoing. After all, I get to know you first. When I saw you in the market fighting off the bullies, I just cannot forget you. But you are so proud and indifferent! Ai! What should I do? If he comes to look for me again, I am afraid I cannot resist him. Can you help me?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed to himself. He knew that Guan Zhongxie has achieved his goal. But making love to Ying Ying first, he has secured an irreplaceable place in her heart that makes it hard for her to resist him. If Ying Ying becomes pregnant, she will have to marry him. What will be the consequences if that happened?

The first to suffer will be the Lord Changping Brothers. Xiao Pan will be suspicious of them and their official posts will also be in peril.



The only way out is to satisfy Ying Ying in a love relationship or marry her officially. Then, Guan Zhongxie will be unable to interfere with her anymore.

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Has Miss Ying tried bush games?"

Ying Ying was stunned, "What are bush games?"

Xiang Shaolong leaned forward to her ear and softly whispered, "That means making love in the wild."

Ying Ying's face became as red as a beetroot and she lowered her head and shook it furiously.

Xiang Shaolong intentionally teased her, "When you shake your head, does it mean that you have not tried it or is not willing to try it?"

Like an exploding volcano, Ying Ying leapt into his bosom and embraced his neck smiling sweetly, "I want to try but I can't. My period is here."

Xiang Shaolong was elated, "It is all right as this is considered the safety window."

Ying Ying was taken aback, "What is a safety window?"

Xiang Shaolong kicked himself for spouting nonsense. Without explaining himself, he hugged her well-proportioned body and kissed her passionately for some time before releasing her. With her face and ears completely red from his teasing, Ying Ying returned back to the campsite.

When Ji Yanran woke up, she joined Wu Tingfang and the other ladies as they happily accompanied Xiang Shaolong out of the camp. They head to a nearby valley where there is a clear stream for them to take a bath. The Eighteen Guardians stood guard to prevent outsiders from peeping at them.

The ladies are not totally naked but are dressed in their undergarments and shorts. Xiang Shaolong is highly aroused when he saw all the exposed flesh.

The water is very clear and unique rock formations lined the sides of the stream. Among the rock formations are the tangled roots of wild trees that resembled a bonsai plant. At sunset, the golden rays of the sun shone through the leaves and reflected off the water in a stunning display. It is simply heaven on earth.

Listening to the girls squealing and playing, Xiang Shaolong rested on a piece of rock and felt that he was in paradise.

Ji Yanran came to his side and squeezed into his bosom, asking, "When Hubby is going to assault Tian Dan, will you bring me along? Zhi Zhi already indicates that she must come along as this concern her family vengeance."

Xiang Shaolong recalled Zhao Qian's death and hesitated, "Is Tingfang coming along too?"

Ji Yanran replied, "Nope. She will stay behind to take care of Bao'er. Little (Tian) Zhen and Little (Tian) Feng will stay behind too."

Xiang Shaolong hugged her and kissed her mouth, smiling, "So this has already been decided. How can I bear to reject your requests?"

Ji Yanran did not expect him to be so agreeable. To Zhao Zhi, she exclaimed, "Zhi Zhi, Hubby has given his consent."

Zhao Zhi shouted with joy and swam up to him, presenting him with a passionate kiss.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly thought of Shan Rou. If she knows that they are going to attack her sworn enemy, she will be delighted. But where in the world is she?

At the evening banquet, Teng Yi finally came back and reported that Pu Bu and You Zhi (Prince Dan's military advisor) have left this morning to meet up with Xu Yiluan. They are escorted by over a hundred experts from the Wu Family Elite Army.

Xiang Shaolong updated Teng Yi about Huan Qi's analysis of Lord Gaoling's rebel troops and added, "It seems like Lord Gaoling is truly useless. We will only need two thousand Cavalry soldiers and defeat him soundly. The palace guards will deal with Lord Gaoling and his escorts. When the rebellion is suppressed, Lu Buwei will not be able to reap any benefits. For the time being, let's not use our Elite Army yet or Lu Buwei will learn about its strengths."

Teng Yi suggested, "If that is the case, why don't I lead them to chase after Tian Dan first? It is better if I can get the official approval from the Crown Prince. Otherwise, there may be some misunderstandings with the border guards.

Third Brother, the moment you can leave Xianyang City, you must join us as quickly as possible.”

Xiang Shaolong agreed, “We shall act as planned. Second Brother has to travel through the night and must take care.”

Teng Yi assured, “I am someone who never underestimates my opponent. You can put your mind at ease.”

They went to find Jing Jun and discussed things further before Xiang Shaolong rushed to attend the royal banquet.

As he climbed the slope leading to the Royal tents, he met some palace guards who are looking for him as ordered by Xiao Pan. He hastily entered the main royal tent. Xiao Pan is sitting alone beside a table and analyzing a map on the table.

When he caught sight of Xiang Shaolong, he gestured, “There is no one else. Master, please have a seat.”

Recently, it is quite rare for them to meet up alone. Xiang Shaolong can feel his heart warming up. Sitting beside him, he remarked, “I am so happy to see you becoming a capable and useful man.”

Xiao Pan praised, “Master is an excellent judge of character. First, there is Li Si, then Wang Jian, followed by Huan Qi. Huan Qi is someone we can definitely groom.”

Xiang Shaolong whispered, “Don’t forget Lao Ai.”

Both men exchanged a glance and started laughing.

Xiang Shaolong was curious, “Why did Crown Prince suddenly mention Wang Jian?”

Xiao Pan explained, "Earlier, I questioned Huan Qi about Wang Jian's situation and learnt that Wang Jian has conquered large amounts of territories towards the west. Now, the terrified Xiong Nus are all hiding in their rat holes. He even rebuilt the Great Wall and accomplished many other feats. Unfortunately, his contributions have gone unreported because of Lu Buwei. He requested a transfer back to Xianyang City many times but was rejected by Lu Buwei. Hng! This man is a threat to me as long as he is alive."

Xiang Shaolong advised, "Most importantly, Crown Prince must bear with him for the time being. If you oppose him now, you may stand to lose out in the end. Even if we managed to eliminate him, there will be other rebels. The best plan is to wait for him to eliminate all your opponents and then we will eliminate him for good."

Xiao Pan frowned, "The moment he saw Lao Ai being promoted to be the Inner Custodian, he is out to ridicule him. He is an ambitious man and I am concerned that it will be hard to control him in the future. As he is on good terms with Empress, there are many officials that have pledged their loyalty to him."

Xiang Shaolong had a brainwave, "Why don't Crown Prince set up a special elite force that reports directly and only to you. Using training as an excuse, you can send them to stand guard at a place near Xianyang City. If there is any trouble, Crown Prince can easily command them back to the city and quash your enemies."

Xiao Pan was revitalized, "You are right. As Master has said, governing authority comes after military might. But I only trust you and you are busy with the City defences. Ai, but this is the best plan. I am sure that there are Lu Buwei's spies among the Cavalry and Infantry armies. In the future, there will be Lao Ai's spies too. Only soldiers recruited outside Xianyang City can be trusted. By then, I will not be afraid of Lu Buwei."

Xiang Shaolong reminded, "Why don't we use Huan Qi and get Wang Ben to assist him. This is the safest plan."

Xiao Pan was surprised, "Wang Ben is only seventeen. Isn't he too young?"

Xiang Shaolong explained, "Because Huan Qi and Wang Ben are young, they are more courageous and loyal. They are fearless and Lu Buwei is nothing to them. Now, we enjoy the support of Xu Xian and Lu Gong. Using the rebellion as an excuse, we will create this special elite force. Then, Crown Prince can summon Wang Jian back to the capital and replace the aging Meng Ao and Wang Ci. When the time is ripe, they can attack Lu Buwei. After Lu Buwei has been disposed of, full military control lies in your hands and everyone will have to submit to you."

He had a good laugh and knowingly added, "You have Li Si to be your advisor and three powerful generals Wang Jian, Wang Ben and Huan Qi. The world will be yours."

Curious, Xiao Pan asked, "Why didn't Master mention about himself?"

Xiang Shaolong stretched out his hand and patted his shoulder lightly, "After your mother's death and Princess Qian's tragedy, I have lost my fighting spirit. Now, I am staying put to help you. When you are fully in control of Qin, I will leave here for the northern plains and live the rest of my life in peace."

Xiao Pan trembled uncontrollably, "Master, how can you leave me?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled helplessly and whispered, "I represent your past. It is only when I am gone can you truly forget your identity as Xiao Pan and conquer the world, becoming the first Emperor of China, Qin Shihuang. If you respect me, you must accept this piece of advice."

Dumbfounded, Xiao Pan stared at him for a while and repeated 'Qin Shihuang' twice. Amazed, he asked, "Why are Master's casual words so full of deep meanings?"

Xiang Shaolong sincerely swore, "Trust me. In the future, the world will belong to you."

Xiao Pan thought over his words and implored, "Is Master going to pursue Tian Dan?"

Xiang Shaolong recollected that Teng Yi is leaving tonight and quickly updated him. Lord Changping came by to escort Xiao Pan as it is time for the banquet.

Tonight, Xiang Shaolong is more comfortable and natural compared to last night. The two Lord Changping brothers are

sharing his table and Li Si is on his other side. He is seated five tables to the left of Xiao Pan.

Ji Yanran and his wives were absent from the banquet. If not for Zhu Ji's pleading, the reclusive Ji Yanran would not have attended the banquets.

Qin Qing is even more introvert. In fact, this is the first year she took part in the hunting fair. Did she join the hunting fair to support Ji Yanran, Xiao Pan or Xiang Shaolong?

Prince Dan is the only foreign guest and was seated on the first seat to Xiao Pan's right. Following his table is Lu Buwei's and Lord Gaoling's table.

Lord Gaoling is quite tall and his face is slightly pale. He gives people the impression that he is a playboy and his eyes are pretty dull. With him are two middle-aged men in official robes. From his observation, Xiang Shaolong deduced that they are members of the royal family.

Occasionally, Lu Buwei will speak to Guan Zhongxie who is seated beside him. Surprisingly, Lu Niangrong is present and she will peep at him intermittently.

Zhou Zihen and Lu Chan are seated behind them with two other advisor guests. Xiang Shaolong has seen them before but could not remember their names.

The number of guests was about the same as last night. Lu Dan'er, Ying Ying and the female warriors occupied four tables in a far corner. With this arrangement, it shows that



the Qin court values the female warriors as well as honour the prestigious families of Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er.

Without the two top beauties Ji Yanran and Qin Qing, the atmosphere is less lively.

The barbequed meat and wine was served by the palace guards to each table and the air is filled with the aroma of the piping hot food.

To prevent anyone from adding poison to the food, the palace guards paid special attention to the cooking.

Once in a while, Zhu Ji will talk to Xiao Pan. She may be taking this opportunity to repair their strained relationship.

Due to the noisy chatting and sounds of cutlery clattering, Li Si leaned to Xiang Shaolong's ear and whispered, "The Crown Prince is very satisfied with Huan Qi. This man is well-versed in military warfare and is an extraordinary man. Moreover, he is only at a tender age. With proper grooming, he will be another capable general."

Xiang Shaolong is greatly comforted. With Wang Jian, Ji Yanran and Li Si's praising Huan Qi, this man will surely rise to the occasion.

This is part of his long term plan to counter Lu Buwei. By grooming talented Qin natives, it is easy for the Qin military to accept them and they will form a powerful force to counter Lu Buwei and Lao Ai in the future and will also help to secure Xiao Pan as the rightful King of Qin.

At this point in time, Prince Dan toasted Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji. Everyone else followed suit.

When Xiang Shaolong put down his wine cup, Lord Changping turned to him and reported, "The Crown Prince has told us about the rebellion. Let's work together and do a good job. You will take care of the external threats while we take care of the internal threats. We will eliminate every one of them."

Xiang Shaolong smiled, "You are mistaken. The Crown Prince is charge of both internal and external threats. We are only following his orders."

Lord Changping was stunned, "The Crown Prince is barely fifteen, I..."

Xiang Shaolong reminded, "Aren't you aware that the Crown Prince is a natural born talent in terms of warfare and governance? Don't tell me you need the Crown Prince to remind you personally?"

Lord Changping understood what he meant and corrected, "Hey, you are right. Come. Have another drink."

Lord Changwen leaned over, "Last night, Brother Xiang mentioned that he has lost to Guan Zhongxie. What really happened?"

Lord Changping noted that it is something that concerns Ying Ying and listened with a serious expression.

Xiang Shaolong is willing to sacrifice himself for these two friends. Moreover, Ying Ying is considered a rare beauty. He

frankly replied, "Just now, I had a talk with your sister. We will forget about the past but the future is unpredictable. This is because your sister does have feelings for Guan Zhongxie and I have to leave Xianyang City for a period of time after the hunting fair. No one can tell what will happen during this period of time."

Lord Changping concluded, "Why don't the two of you get married officially? If Guan Zhongxie still dares to harass Ying Ying, we have the right to interfere."

Xiang Shaolong hardened his heart, "If Ying Ying is agreeable, we shall act as you wished."

The two brothers are overjoyed and touched at the same time, understanding that Xiang Shaolong is also doing this for their sake.

Lord Changwen cannot sit still anymore and left immediately to look for Ying Ying.

Lu Buwei suddenly toasted Prince Dan and asked, "I heard that the swordplay of Yan is exquisite and focused mainly on soft stances. I wonder if you can demonstrate a few stances for our viewing pleasure."

Everyone quietened down and everyone is now staring at Prince Dan.

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed. His secret meetings with Prince Dan have been leaked to Lu Buwei.

Now, he is trying to ridicule the people of Yan and broadcast his own talents.

If he is forced to act, he will walk straight into their trap.

Because whoever that can defeat Xiang Shaolong now will be crowned the number one swordsman of Qin.

## CHAPTER 12

## A Chaotic Banquet

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

SEATED between Physician Leng Ting and General Xu Yize, Prince Dan did not show any signs of surprise and smiled, “I heard Mister Guan Zhongxie from your esteemed residence has defeated the experts of Qi. I wonder if he will show us some of his skills.”

Prince Dan, the successor to the Yan throne, is used to such challenges and difficulties. He knew that he cannot shy away from duelling. Otherwise, it may be a sign of cowardice and in this foreign state of Qin, he must fight or Qin may use this

as an excuse to attack Yan. Success and failures are common in fighting. Even if he loses, he will be disgraced but it is something that is inevitable. However, Prince Dan intentionally singled out Guan Zhongxie to counter Lu Buwei. If Lu Buwei sent Guan Zhongxie out, it shows that Prince Dan has good foresight. If Lu Buwei did not send Guan Zhongxie out, he can only send Lu Chan as Lao Ai has left him and Zhou Zihen was defeated by Jing Jun last night. Prince Dan has seen Lu Chan's sword skills and can choose a fighter from his team to counter his weak points. It is only two simple sentences but it has highlighted the intelligence of Prince Dan.

Lu Buwei did not expect Prince Dan to counter him so effectively and began laughing. He winked at Guan Zhongxie and Guan Zhongxie acknowledged his order with another laugh and stepped out to an open area beside the banquet grounds. He paid his respects to Prince Dan, "I am flattered by your high opinion of my lowly skills. Here I am and will Prince please send your expert and let us learn from each other."

Now, it is Prince Dan's turn to be agonized. Lu Buwei carried out a chain attack and now, it seems like Lu Buwei has no intention to send Guan Zhongxie but did so to appease Prince Dan. Everyone was excited at the martial arts competition as well as the chance to ridicule the people of Yan and cheered loudly. After all, Guan Zhongxie's swordsmanship is one of the best in Xianyang City and it is possible that he is even better than Xiang Shaolong. With his

amazing archery that killed four birds with two arrows, he is now as respected as Xiang Shaolong who threw the five flying needles. But as most people have never seen him fight, everyone is waiting eagerly in anticipation. The crowd is cheering loudly and the mood is extremely lively. Before he even start fighting, Guan Zhongxie has impressed the crowd with his muscular frame, solid built and imposing air.

Xiang Shaolong could not help but glanced over to the female warriors. Every one of them including Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er was whispering at each other and has an intoxicated expression on their faces. He could not help but trembled strongly. If Guan Zhongxie is allowed to show off his might, the two fickle ladies Ying Ying and Lu Dan'er may surrender to his seduction. Now that his injury is more or less healed, should he enter the fighting ring? If he lost, the consequences will be disastrous. But if he did not fight because he was afraid of losing, it will prick his conscience and affect his self-confidence. As he was thinking furiously, Prince Dan pretended to be pleased and sent a fighter from the back seat. This man announced his name to be Yan Du. Everyone was alarmed as this man is a reputable fighter too.

Xiang Shaolong could not help but asked Lord Changping about Yan Du. Lord Changping happily explained, "This man is one of the top three fighters of Yan. We have no idea that he came to Xianyang City with Prince Dan. It is rumoured that his sword speed is as fast as lightning and can cut open swallows that are flying in mid air. That is how good he is."

Xiang Shaolong took a closer look at Yan Du. Yan Du is a tall and thin man with a lump on each side of his forehead. His eyes are brimming with energy and he is around the age of twenty five. He is not considered a handsome man but has an extraordinary air around him. The most remarkable thing about him is that he is clothed fully in yellow. With a crooked nose like an eagle, he radiates calmness. However, Guan Zhongxie is even more eye-catching than him. In a snow white outfit, his head is tied neatly in a red bun and is half a head taller than the tall Yan Du. If Yan Du is a well-prepared fighter, Guan Zhongxie is casual-looking fighter. On his arrogant face is an irritating smile that shows his despise for everyone. No wonder Ying Ying may be in love with Xiang Shaolong but still succumbed to his advances. Both men paid their respects to Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji, asking permission to begin their fight.

Xiao Pan may not realise that this duel is ultimately aimed to ruin Xiang Shaolong's reputation but he did not want Guan Zhongxie to have any chance to show off his skills. But with Zhu Ji supporting at the side, he helplessly consented, "The duel is a friendly match and shall cease when a winner has been determined. I do not want to see any bloodshed or deaths tonight."

Both men kneeled down and accepted his order. However, everyone knows that it is a real duel with real weapons being used. It is really hard to avoid injuring the opponent.



Some brought out two armour suits from the crowd and Guan Zhongxie smiled, "I do not need the armour. Brother Yan, please help yourself."

Yan Du had no choice but to reject the armour too as it will affect his agility. Before they drew their swords, both men stood still under the illumination of the torches. Their killing aura immediately flooded the area as everyone held their breaths in silence so as not to affect their concentration.

Jiang! Yan Du drew his sword first and displayed a magnificent pose with the sword across his chest. True experts like Xiang Shaolong could tell that he is actually succumbing to Guan Zhongxie's pressure and needed to draw his sword and stabilised himself. It is something that only experts can sense. Just like during a battle, an experienced General can predict the victory based on the morale and the determination of the soldiers.

Guan Zhongxie laughed loudly and his left arm patted the sword that was hanging around his right waist. He solemnly state, "My sword is named Longstrike and it is forged by the blacksmiths of Yue. The sword is five feet and four inches long, which makes it one foot longer than most swords. Brother Yan must not neglect its length."

Jiang! Longstrike was drawn out by his right hand in a flash. While everyone is dazzled by the stunning brilliance of the flashing sword, Guan Zhongxie stepped forward and sent his sword towards Yan Du. Xiang Shaolong was reminded about something when he saw Guan Zhongxie patting his sword

with his left hand. He summoned the Guardians and instructed them to retrieve his Mohist Sword.

Yan Du's sword flew out and clashed heavily with Guan Zhongxie's sword.

'Dang!'

Both men withdrew their sword and retreated a few steps, eyeing each other with caution.

Everyone was still holding their breaths. The first strike is both men testing each other's skills. The real show is yet to come. Xiang Shaolong noticed Yan Du's hand is shaking slightly and guessed that his arm strength is much weaker than Guan Zhongxie. Yan Du may have a very good martial arts foundation but unfortunately, his opponent is Guan Zhongxie.

Glowing with confidence, Guan Zhongxie let out a cold snort and sent another strike towards Yan Du. Although the attack is similar to the one before, the onlookers can sense that it is an earth-shattering attack that will be quite impossible to defend no matter who you are. Yan Du roared and his sword flicked out from the side, drawing an arc before clashing with Longstrike with a loud, 'Keng!'

Despite making a later move, his sword hit first and did not disgrace the reputation of Yan swordplay. Even so, he was shaken and had to take a small step back. Guan Zhongxie was about to press on with another attack when Yan Du roared again and took three steps back. In his hands, his sword drew circles in the air which reflected the torches.

Now his sword appears to be on fire. It is an amazing swordplay and everyone finally broke the silence and exploded in loud cheering.

Guan Zhongxie did not expect his swordplay to be so exquisite and it prevented him from advancing further. Summoning his heroic courage, he let out a long roar and withdrew his sword. He swing it strongly forward like a trail of rainbow and the sword rung loudly as it sliced through the air. His pose is awe-inspiring and exudes a godly aura and a sense of invincibility. The feeling is so intense that even Yan Du is affected and his battle strength dropped by twenty percent. The two weapons clashed in a blink of an eye and they exchanged several strokes spontaneously. Like a bolt from the blue, both men suddenly retreated at the speed of light. As no one can see their earlier fight very clearly, it is still a mystery who the winner is.

Jiang! Guan Zhongxie sheathed his sword. Despite both his eyes still focusing on his opponent, his sword accurately entered the tiny gap of his sheathe like a poisonous snake with eyes. Everyone was shocked at his gesture while the female warriors are cheering at the top of their voices.

Yan Du's sword is still aimed at Guan Zhongxie but his face has turned completely white and there are large drops of perspiration on his forehead. He shook and lowered his sword on the floor, leaning against it like a walking stick. It seems like he has over exerted himself. On his forehead, there is a horizontal sword wound. It is only a surface wound as Guan Zhongxie has been merciful. However, such a

prominent injury and resulting scar will only constantly remind Yan Du and the people around him that he was once defeated by this heartless man.

Guan Zhongxie cupped his hands, "Thanks for allowing me to win."

Someone came out from the crowd and helped a furious Yan Du out. In the midst of all the cheering, Guan Zhongxie paid his respects to Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji. Prince Dan and Leng Ting maintained a calm expression but Xu Yize and the other men were incensed at Guan Zhongxie's offending injury.

Lu Buwei laughed loudly, "Guan Zhongxie, you disobeyed the Crown Prince's order and blood is seen. I punish you with this cup of wine."

By now, even Prince Dan and Leng Ting have an ugly expression on their faces as Lu Buwei has gone too far with this insolent remark.

Sitting at Lu Buwei's table, Cai Ze exclaimed, "Zhongxie's swordsmanship had aroused our interest. I wonder if Assistant Commander Jing is around. I would love to see him pitting his skills against Zhongxie."

Guan Zhongxie received his cup of wine from Lu Buwei and toasted in the direction of Xiao Pan, Zhu Ji and the crowd. Everyone in the crowd raised their wine cups and toasted to him in return.

Xiang Shaolong is more sure than ever that Lu Buwei is out to get him. He guessed that Lu Buwei believes that Xiao Pan

holds him in high regard because he is a national hero. Thus, before he 'dies', Lu Buwei wants to disgrace Xiang Shaolong in public and make Xiao Pan shift his hero-worship to Guan Zhongxie instead.

With Cai Ze's comment, it is hard for him to remain silent. He plainly state, "Assistant Commander is attending to some duties and is not present at the banquet. I am sorry for disappointing Official Cai."

Cai Ze is well-prepared for his answer and continued his digging, "Last night, there is also a man named Huan Qi who won three consecutive fights. Let's have a taste of his skills again!"

Lu Buwei's supporters begin to cheer supportively at his suggestion. Obviously, they are trying to instigate a fight between Xiang Shaolong and Guan Zhongxie.

Lord Changping sensed that something is amiss. He whispered into Xiang Shaolong's ears, "They are trying to embarrass you! Hng!"

Xiang Shaolong knew that this fight is inevitable. There is no way he will let Huan Qi fight Guan Zhongxie. If Huan Qi is killed or heavily injured by Guan Zhongxie, he would have let Wang Jian down and Xiao Pan's dream of a special elite force will be dashed. Even if Huan Qi did not suffer any injuries, his newly minted reputation will be destroyed. He glanced quickly at the female warriors and saw that every one of them including Ying Ying are totally mesmerized by Guan Zhongxie. If he did not fight now, Ying Ying will be lost to

Guan Zhongxie and Jing Jun will lose Lu Dan'er too. Moreover, if he came up with another excuse that Huan Qi is away for work, Lu Buwei's men will spread rumours that he, Xiang Shaolong, is afraid of Guan Zhongxie. Finally, he looked at Xiao Pan. Xiao Pan is looking back at him with a hopeful expression.

Rejuvenated, Xiang Shaolong let out a long laugh. He stood up and casually said, "Since Official Guan is so enthusiastic, let me have some fun with you!"

The crowd was completely silent for a split second before erupting into loud clapping and cheering.

Guan Zhongxie smiled, "Official Xiang's leg is injured and should not fight. If the wound reopened, I will feel guilty."

Zhu Ji interrupted, "Shaolong should not force yourself!"

Xiang Shaolong unbuckled Bloodwave and handed it to Wu Shu behind him. He received the Mohist Sword and felt his fighting spirit rising. He thought that since he will have to fight him sooner or later, it might as well be tonight. He smiled, "If Official Guan can make my wound reopen, I will surrender the fight to you!"

The crowd saw that his words are full of dominating spirit and clapped loudly for him, adding to the liveliness of the situation. Xiang Shaolong exchanged a knowing glance at Prince Dan and Leng Ting before he walked to the centre of the fighting arena. Standing side by side with Guan Zhongxie, they paid their respects to Xiao Pan.

Xiao Pan has full confidence in Xiang Shaolong's amazing swordplay. Pleased, he advised both of them, "Weapons are blind, please fight with caution."

Xiang Shaolong understood that Xiao Pan wanted him to kill Guan Zhongxie. Inspired, he thought of a winning strategy. Guan Zhongxie believed that he will be dying tomorrow and will not sacrifice his own life to defeat him. Based on this point, he is at a serious disadvantage. Another benefit is that he has seen Guan Zhongxie fight but Guan Zhongxie has no idea about his own swordplay but only managed to hear it from other people's experiences. If he demonstrated his full Mohist swordplay, he is confident of giving Guan Zhongxie a run for his money. Thinking about these points, he formulated a winning plan.

Both men stood apart from each other. As the crowd looked on, they stared at each other's eyes and thus, the ultimate battle has begun! By now, there are many onlookers who have gathered around when they heard about the duelling. Now, the whole place is extremely packed. When Wu Shu went back to retrieve the Mohist Sword, Ji Yanran and the girls were alarmed and hurriedly rushed over. Now, they managed to squeeze themselves at Lord Changping's table. Qin Qing is here as well and joined their table. Everyone is in a great mood. Zhu Ji is worried that Guan Zhongxie will injure Xiang Shaolong and her expression is grave. She nearly wanted to leave as she could not bear to see the fight.

Guan Zhongxie humbly state, "Being able to fight with Official Xiang is one of the highlights of my life."

Xiang Shaolong coldly replied, "I wonder if Official Guan will use his best skill today – the Left Hand Swordplay?"

The moment he said this, the crowd went, "Wah..."

Nobody expected that in all his past fights, Guan Zhongxie had been concealing his true ability.

For the first time ever, Guan Zhongxie's face changed colour and he dryly smiled, "Official Xiang is truly observant."

This is the moment Xiang Shaolong has been waiting for. The Mohist Sword leaning on his shoulder sprang into the air and he advanced forward quickly. Using the heavy weight of the Mohist sword, he attacked Guan Zhongxie face on.

'Jiang!'

Indeed, Guan Zhongxie pulled out his sword using his left arm and adopted the horse stance. As quick as lightning, he blocked the Mohist sword.

Instead of following up with another attack, Xiang Shaolong withdrew and adopted one of the three Mozi killing stances, Defending Attack. The wooden sword was flying everywhere and Guan Zhongxie could not decipher if it is an attacking stance or a defending stance. Moreover, he was distracted by Xiang Shaolong earlier and did not know how to counter him. Reluctantly, he took two steps back to recompose himself. Everyone saw that Xiang Shaolong performed a miraculous first attack befitting his reputation and broke out into loud cheers.



Xiang Shaolong entered the calm state of Mohist meditation and abandoned all his emotions, including the fear of defeat, fear of death, etc. His mind is completely clear and every single movement made by Guan Zhongxie cannot escape his eyes. Everyone saw that both are awe-inspiring warriors and resembled heavenly generals and could not help but feel even more excited than before. It is the first time Ying Ying and the female warriors witnessed Xiang Shaolong's fascinating skills and were completely swept away. For the moment, they did not know who to cheer for.

Guan Zhongxie can detect the increasing confidence and fighting power of Xiang Shaolong. The corner of his mouth curled in a smile and he coldly snorted before he sent his sword towards Xiang Shaolong. From this attack, everyone can tell that his left hand is indeed superior to his right hand. His head, arm, waist and feet were in perfect coordination.

Although it is only his left arm holding the sword, it felt like his whole body is part of the attack. It is a startling move that sends shivers down everyone's spine. It is an incredibly fast attack but it looks slow at the same time. Everyone can see his sword clearly and even can predict where it will hit. Even so, the attack is so powerful that it seems to be unavoidable. Such a unique move that is both fast and slow is the pinnacle of swordplay.

While everyone is worried for Xiang Shaolong, Xiang Shaolong maintained his calm expression and used his left hand to hold his sword instead. In a perfect counterattack, the heavy Mohist Sword landed squarely three inches away

from the tip of Guan Zhongxie's sword. Xiang Shaolong is truly formidable. Using the heavy wooden sword, he has nullified Guan Zhongxie's stronger arm strength. At the same time, the blow hit the weakest point of Guan Zhongxie's sword and deflected it away.

Never in his wildest dreams would Guan Zhongxie expect Xiang Shaolong to use his left hand. All his earlier strategies have gone to waste. He was also alarmed at the heavy wooden sword's attacking power.

Xiang Shaolong consecutively attacked him three times but Guan Zhongxie did not take a single step back but defend himself well. Using his strength and fast reflexes, he met each of Xiang Shaolong's heavy blows head on. Everyone was intoxicated by their grandeur and madly cheered for both of them.

Every time their weapons clashed, a loud sound was made. After the three heavy blows, Xiang Shaolong followed up with another seven blows. Before the crowd suffocated under the aura of his pressing attacks, the two men separated and stared at each other fiercely. Xiang Shaolong needed to catch his breath while Guan Zhongxie needed to recover from the fierce attacks and did not dare to retaliate.

Xiang Shaolong is full of admiration. He crossed swords with Xiao Weimou before and often sparred with Teng Yi who has better arm strength than himself. Thus, he is familiar when dealing with people like Guan Zhongxie. In his ten attacks, he incorporated elements of biology, parabolic and rotation

theory but Guan Zhongxie still managed to fend him off without taking a step backwards. Thus, Guan Zhongxie's defending skills are watertight and have reached an extremely high level. In addition, he attacked Guan Zhongxie when he is in a disadvantaged position but is unable to overcome him. Based on this point, he knows that he cannot defeat him. But this is normal under ordinary circumstances. Ultimately, fights are normally won on psychology factors and strategy which Xiang Shaolong happened to be an expert on both subjects.

Guan Zhongxie is horrified. Since the day he learnt sword-fighting, he has always focused on sword attacks. For the past ten clashes, he is painfully defending himself. This is something that he has never encountered all his life. The crowd became silent as everyone anticipated their second bout. Guan Zhongxie composed himself earlier that Xiang Shaolong and immediately sent his sword flying towards Xiang Shaolong. His sword swung up from below, aiming at Xiang Shaolong's chest.

Holding his sword horizontally across him, a steady Xiang Shaolong let out a long howl and ignored the incoming sword. He slanted his body to one side and sent his own sword towards Guan Zhongxie's forehead. Everyone was shocked but Xiang Shaolong knew better. He has yet to catch his breath from their earlier exchange. If he insisted on defending himself, he will be forced to retreat. When that happens, Guan Zhongxie can follow up with more attacks and sooner or later, he will succumb to his stronger arm

strength. But with his unorthodox move, he has avoided the attack partially and Guan Zhongxie will need some time to change the direction of his attack. It is a trick to stall for time. In the end, he may be heavily injured but his heavy Mohist sword will land on Guan Zhongxie's forehead and kill him instantly.

This is the first time in his life Guan Zhongxie is fighting a man who is willing to sacrifice his own life to win. As Xiang Shaolong expected, Guan Zhongxie will not sacrifice himself and frantically withdrew his sword to deflect his blow.

'Dang!'

A loud sound resonated throughout the area. Xiang Shaolong has used up every single bit of strength in his body in this attack. Coupled with the heavy wooden sword, Guan Zhongxie was badly shaken and could not hold back any more. He finally took a step back.

Xiang Shaolong will not let this golden opportunity slip by. He used the most powerful Mozi Killing Stance, Attacking and Defending at the same time. His sword aura became more powerful and his attacks are full of intricate changes. Like waves after waves of the majestic river, he assaulted Guan Zhongxie relentlessly. Guan Zhongxie saw that his moves are out of the ordinary and let out a long howl, defending himself from all his attacks. Every onlooker from Xiao Pan to the palace guards were shouting out their cheers and it was an emotional scene.

Xiang Shaolong's killing aura grew and he forgot all about the Mohist swordplay. He simply attacked Guan Zhongxie whenever there is an opening and his moves are unpredictable. Like a pouncing beast, he was full of energy, fast and every single attack he made is vicious and out to take Guan Zhongxie's life. Against his own wishes, Guan Zhongxie is forced to retreat. When he took the seventh step back, Xiang Shaolong's attack became weaker and Guan Zhongxie managed to turn the tables around using a special move and blocked Xiang Shaolong's sword.

After Xiang Shaolong attacked him one more time, he retreated and leisurely put his wooden sword on his shoulder. Guan Zhongxie sighed with relief and dared not retaliate. Again, the two men stared at each other fiercely.

With a shocked expression on his face, Lu Buwei stood up and shouted, "Stop!"

Everyone turned and looked at him.

# VOLUME 15

## CHAPTER 1

### Clash Of The Titans

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BEFORE Lu Buwei could say anything else, Xiang Shaolong interrupted with a laugh, “That was a good fight, isn’t it? If Premier Mentor wanted Official Guan and me to stop

fighting, I am afraid I will not agree to it. Is there anyone in the crowd that want this fight to end like this?"

The whole crowd erupted in loud cheers and supported Xiang Shaolong's decision to extend the fight.

With the shouting escalating to an unimaginable volume, Lu Buwei's voice is totally drowned out.

Lu Buwei did not expect Xiang Shaolong to interrupt him. Obviously, he is out to kill Guan Zhongxie. He was angered but powerless to intervene. After all, he was the one who initiated the whole thing and forced Xiang Shaolong's hand. He did not anticipate Xiang Shaolong to put up such a good fight.

Even Guan Zhongxie is at a serious disadvantage.

What shocked him the most is Xiang Shaolong's desperate fighting method. He is willing to sacrifice his own life to have Guan Zhongxie killed.

Lu Buwei is sure that Xiang Shaolong will die tomorrow. Why should he allow Guan Zhongxie to accompany him in death?

He was infuriated at Xiang Shaolong's suggestion. Now, no matter what he says, there is no way he can prevent the fight from continuing. Otherwise, others will think that he is afraid of Guan Zhongxie losing to Xiang Shaolong. This will cause Guan Zhongxie's reputation to take a beating.

Guan Zhongxie understood Lu Buwei's intention. But in the present circumstances, he must never back down or he will

forever lose the chance to challenge Xiang Shaolong to a duel. With a loud cough, he paid his respects to Lu Buwei.

Everyone knew that he has something to say and quietened down. Now, Guan Zhongxie has everyone's attention.

With a solemn expression, Guan Zhongxie coolly state, "I understand the good intention of Premier Mentor. Official Xiang and I will not harm each other as this is only a friendly match. I hope to continue our unresolved battle too."

Everyone exploded into loud cheers, knowing that the show will go on.

Xiang Shaolong propped up his sword with a smile. He is in a great mood.

He has finally conquered his fear of Guan Zhongxie. At the same time, he realised that if he did not defeat Guan Zhongxie tonight, he will never have the guts to do it in the future.

His biggest advantage tonight is that his opponent will not 'sacrifice' himself to defeat him.

In the future, he will not have any more opportunities like this.

Lu Buwei's face was drained of colour, acknowledging that this fight must go on. He could imagine Xiang Shaolong's determination to eliminate Guan Zhongxie and sighed secretly.



Tonight's events have been very different from what he had visualized.

He looked at Zhu Ji with a pleading expression and was stunned to discover this Empress of Qin staring at Xiang Shaolong with an intoxicated look on her face. Thus, she did not notice him at all. Just as he hardened his resolve, Lu Gong happened to butt in, "Will the Crown Prince please decide if the fight should go on."

Now, the matter is in the hands of Xiao Pan and Lu Buwei is out of the picture. This is equivalent to slapping Lu Buwei in the face.

Xiao Pan looked around him and saw that the area was packed to the brim with his Qin people. His eyes lit up and he calmly state, "Premier Mentor, please return to your seat first!"

Lu Buwei is a crafty man who always has a ready reply. He laughed loudly, "Everyone is mistaken. It is such an exciting fight and I will never dream of stopping it. I only wanted to provide a prize for the winning fighter. Whoever wins this fight will get to marry my daughter."

When he finished speaking, the crowd began to howl and the atmosphere is electrifying.

Lu Niangrong did not expect her father to pull such a stunt. Shocked, her face turned red and she was at a loss.

Given the situation, there is no way that she can protest.

Guan Zhongxie's eyes were filled with renewed energy.

If Xiang Shaolong is the winner, Lu Nianrong will definitely marry him. When he dies tomorrow, Lu Nianrong may resume her freedom to marry but will never marry a loser like him.

Lu Buwei's words are to force him to win at all costs. Guan Zhongxie's fighting strength increased dramatically and he abandoned all his earlier reservations regarding sacrificing his life for Xiang Shaolong.

All the while, Xiang Shaolong has been observing Lu Buwei. He noticed Lu Buwei winking to Mo Ao who is hiding among the crowd. Mo Ao gestured back to him and finally pointed at Lu Nianrong. Xiang Shaolong had to acknowledge that Mo Ao is really formidable.

Mo Ao's intelligence is second to none. He actually managed to determine Guan Zhongxie's weakness to be his fear of sacrifice. With Lu Nianrong entering the picture, Guan Zhongxie will also be fighting for a lifetime of happiness with her. Thus, he will take the fight more seriously.

Since Xiang Shaolong entered the special elite commando unit, he has undergone many years of rigorous army training. His willpower and determination are without equal. He wasn't demoralised at all but instead, his fighting strength increased by leaps and bounds. With a smile, he glanced at Xiao Pan.

While Xiao Pan may have detected that Guan Zhongxie is now a more determined man with a strong killing aura; he cannot disobey the wishes of the crowd. He waved and

proclaimed, "As Premier Mentor has indicated, the fight will continue."

All the cheering immediately subsided and the crowd became serious and quiet, focusing their attention on the two expert swordsmen.

At the side, Qin Qing, Ji Yanran, Jing Jun and the others were equally nervous. With all their hearts, they wished that they can lend Xiang Shaolong a helping hand but unfortunately, he must fight alone.

With a cool expression and his eyes shining like electricity, Guan Zhongxie fixed his gaze on Xiang Shaolong. In his hands, his sword slowly moved into an attacking pose and his killing aura is highly intense.

Everyone can feel the ferocity of his weapon and knew that if he attacked, it will be an extremely ferocious move. For Guan Zhongxie to exude such an emotion to the crowd, his fighting strength has reached its peak.

Xiang Shaolong felt that his fighting strength is not as intense. Inspired by the samurais' intense fighting strength, he made up his mind to display a similar samurai attack pose. For Guan Zhongxie who has never seen a samurai, it will become an advantageous distraction.

He parted his legs and adopted a half squat position. He grabbed his sword with both hands and pointed the sword at Guan Zhongxie briefly before he slowly raised the weapon high above his head just like what a samurai warrior would do.

Everyone, especially Guan Zhongxie was taken aback at his unusual pose. The crowd began to whisper among themselves as everyone is puzzled by Xiang Shaolong's unique posture.

Guan Zhongxie was intimidated. He felt that no matter how he tried to attack Xiang Shaolong, Xiang Shaolong will swing down his sword and attack his forehead just like before. Moreover, Xiang Shaolong is now holding the sword with both hands and the incoming blow will shatter his skull for sure. For a moment, he dared not attack.

His swordplay relied heavily on the opening pose. With this mental obstacle, his strong fighting strength has decreased by thirty percent.

Xiang Shaolong can sense Guan Zhongxie's energy dropping due to his trick. Grabbing this golden opportunity, he coldly snorted and advanced forward. Above his head, the Mohist Sword slammed down heavily in the direction of Guan Zhongxie's face. Although this is a sword stance from the Mohist Swordplay, Xiang Shaolong has executed it with two hands instead of one.

Guan Zhongxie is unwilling to retreat but did not want to use his sword with both hands. He let out a grunt and swung his sword upwards to defend against the Mohist Sword.

'Pong!'

The Mohist sword was slightly deflected to one side. Xiang Shaolong managed to gain an opening and pressed on with five more attacks with each of them faster than the last one.

Shaken, Guan Zhongxie was forced to take several steps back. If not for his superior arm strength, he will have succumbed to the vicious attacks and lose his footing.

Xiang Shaolong's supporters are cheering wildly for him. Eighty percent of the crowd wanted to see their hero defeat Guan Zhongxie.

Lu Buwei's and Mo Ao's expression became very ugly. They did not foresee Xiang Shaolong using such a strange strategy and overcoming Guan Zhongxie despite his superior arm strength.

But Xiang Shaolong knew that if he allowed Guan Zhongxie to attack him, he will be defending himself in agony.

In addition, Guan Zhongxie is blocking his moves using the least amount of strength. Despite being in a disadvantaged position, his energy consumption is much lesser compared to Xiang Shaolong.

If not for his heavy Mohist Sword, it will be hard for Xiang Shaolong to force Guan Zhongxie backwards.

Xiang Shaolong knew that Guan Zhongxie is still being tricked by him. While he is still gaining the upper hand, he laughed loudly and retreated. Using only his right hand to hold his sword, he pointed the sword at the terrified Guan Zhongxie, stating, "Official Guan is a true expert. Thanks for showing mercy to me!"

Guan Zhongxie was publicly embarrassed. A cold murderous look flashed across his eyes and he coldly hissed, "Official

Xiang is about to win. Why did you retreat out of a sudden? Has your wound reopened?!"

Xiang Shaolong took this chance to catch his breath. He smiled, "Official Guan is really good at telling jokes. We are not here to kill each other and must take turn showing our true abilities to Miss Niangrong. Earlier, I attacked while you defended. Now, I will defend while you attack."

Even though they have stopped fighting with their swords, they are still 'fighting' with their words. Everyone was thrilled and continued watching the excitement.

Guan Zhongxie lost the debate as he was angry with Xiang Shaolong's remark. He knew that he has spoken out rudely and reminded himself not to underestimate Xiang Shaolong. He smiled back, "If this is the case, I will attack as you instructed."

The moment he finished speaking, his eyes shone energetically at his opponent.

Xiang Shaolong knows his opponent like the back of his hand. Guan Zhongxie is better than him in terms of arm strength and fighting experience.

Luckily, his earlier tricks have eroded his confidence. Otherwise, he will definitely lose.

In this life and death situation, he dared not take any chances. Clearing his mind of all thoughts, he adopted a defensive pose and eyed Guan Zhongxie with caution. Every single part of his body and mind is in a state of emptiness,

displaying one of the three Mozi Killing Stances, Defending Attack. He guarded his body well and quietly awaits Guan Zhongxie's attack.

Guan Zhongxie realised that this is the last opportunity for him to repair his reputation. Ideally, he wants to defeat Xiang Shaolong. It will be good to force Xiang Shaolong to retreat into submission. Otherwise, it is as good as losing the fight.

All along, he has complete confidence that he can defeat Xiang Shaolong. But from tonight's fight, he was forced into a disadvantaged situation many times despite not losing the battle yet. As a result, his confidence is shaken and he cannot fight with his full potential.

The onlookers are increasing tremendously. From a banquet attendance of two hundred odd guests, now, there are more than three thousand people watching the fight. No one wanted a break as the fight is extremely exciting and nerve-wrecking.

Guan Zhongxie's Longstrike sword wavered slightly. When his fighting strength has reached its peak, his eyes focused ahead and he took large strides towards Xiang Shaolong. A strong sword and a stronger sword aura sliced through the air.

Xiang Shaolong stood as steady as a mountain and his eyes are shining coldly, giving the impression that he is as solid as a rock and is unafraid of the waves clashing in.

Guan Zhongxie took another step and is now ten steps away from Xiang Shaolong. Now his fighting strength is even higher than before. He coldly questioned, "Is Official Xiang determined to defeat me and win Lu Nianrong's hand in marriage?"

Xiang Shaolong cursed him secretly. Guan Zhongxie is really a scumbag. Knowing that he is unwilling to marry Lu Nianrong, he purposely said these words to distract him. If Xiang Shaolong is reminded that he has to marry Lu Nianrong after winning the fight, his fighting spirit would naturally decrease and so will his fighting strength.

This is also part of Mo Ao's brilliant plan by asking Lu Buwei to marry Lu Nianrong to the winner.

To defeat a man, you must first destroy his will. This is a fact that Mo Ao knows very well.

Xiang Shaolong recomposed himself and laughed, "Miss Nianrong is such a rare beauty; I believe Official Guan is trying to defeat me so that you can marry her."

His words are out to distract Guan Zhongxie too. He wanted to remind Guan Zhongxie that he will die of poisoning tomorrow. Thus, it is not important whether he will marry Lu Nianrong or not. But Guan Zhongxie cannot afford to lose. With this thought messing up his head, he will be unable to unleash his full potential.

Guan Zhongxie did have the intention and was slightly surprised. His sword resonated with a strong killing aura and his strong desire to win can be felt.



Xiang Shaolong was not alarmed but was delighted instead. Cha! He took a step forward and waved the Mohist Sword around, taunting Guan Zhongxie.

Guan Zhongxie was forced to attack him with a troubled mind. As Xiang Shaolong is remaining in a defending position, he did not break his promise to let Guan Zhongxie attack him.

Everyone was inebriated at their intellectual contest and their swordsmanship contest.

Guan Zhongxie has no other way out. He howled and Longstrike transformed into a blazing trail and struck towards Xiang Shaolong's face like a thunderbolt.

His attack is fierce, powerful and solid. Everyone was startled at his attack and forgot to cheer.

Xiang Shaolong has successfully forced Guan Zhongxie to strike earlier than he had intended. His Mohist Sword swung out like the wind and put up a watertight defence.

In a short span of time, Longstrike and the Mohist sword has clashed ten over times.

'Pong! Pong! Pong!'

Everyone was highly thrilled and was jumping up and down with excitement. Both men began to fight at an even faster speed and their movements are so fast it became blurred. The crowd was so immersed in the fight that everyone forgot to cheer.

Using the advantage of the heavy sword, Xiang Shaolong countered every blow head on to destroy Guan Zhongxie's confidence and pride.

Except for the three killing stances, the Mohist Swordplay emphasizes on defence rather than attack. Originally, it is meant to force the enemy to submit rather than destroying the enemy. However, every defensive move has an element of attack, which is similar to the Killing Stance, Defending Attack. Therefore, Guan Zhongxie cannot show off his powerful chain attacks.

In the past, when Mohist Juzi Yuan Zong is training Xiang Shaolong, he only used a few casual strokes but managed to make Xiang Shaolong retreat a few steps. Thus, the defensive Mohist Swordplay is more than meets the eye.

Despite all his psychological tricks and strategies, he cannot defeat Guan Zhongxie, not to mention taking his life.

He intentionally retreated earlier and tricked Guan Zhongxie into attacking him now. With his invincible Mohist Swordplay defence, he can prevent himself from being defeated. Additionally, Guan Zhongxie must guard against the Killing Stance, Defending Attack. In the end, he will still be regarded as the winner in the eyes of the crowd.

Since there is no clear winner, he need not marry Lu Niangrong.

Tonight, Xiang Shaolong has used up every one of his abilities in order to counter his nemesis Guan Zhongxie.

The more Guan Zhongxie fought, the more fearful he was. In front of the crowd, his attack is powerful, fierce and quick. But in his mind, he knows that his energy is depleting faster than Xiang Shaolong's. After thirty odd stances, he has yet to force Xiang Shaolong to take one step back. If this carries on, he will be drained and Xiang Shaolong can use this opportunity to finish him off.

He is a top swordsman and knows that he is committing a big mistake. He purposely slowed down and created an opening to trick Xiang Shaolong into attacking him.

Unknown to him, Xiang Shaolong's Mohist Swordplay is a gentlemen's swordplay with no hints of malice. Even if there is an opening, he will not take advantage of it. Guan Zhongxie was petrified, thinking that Xiang Shaolong has seen through his trick. His fighting strength dropped by another ten percent.

All around them, the crowd finally broke out into loud clapping and cheering. The noise produced is deafening.

'Pong!'

After a final clash, Guan Zhongxie retreated while he still has some strength left. Otherwise, he will risk losing his life when he is completely drained of all his strength.

Xiang Shaolong did not wish to kill him. Moreover, his own strength is also heavily depleted. He wanted to retaliate but his body can no longer hold out.

At the same time, he sighed with relief. If Guan Zhongxie pressed on his attacks, he may be the one who will eventually succumb.

The fight still ended in a draw.

The crowd became extremely quiet.

Both men can no longer conceal their loud panting sounds.

Xu Xian stood up and announced, "Let me be the judge. This fight has ended without a clear winner. Miss Niangrong's marriage will be arranged at a later date."

The entire crowd exploded in a thunderous applause and wild cheering, showing their appreciation at the exciting duel. Even after a long time, the cheering did not subside.

## CHAPTER 2

## Calm Before The Storm

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHEN Xiang Shaolong returned to his table, he received a hero's welcome from his wives and men. But deep in his heart, he knew that he is inferior to Guan Zhongxie in terms of physical strength and swordsmanship. He managed to end the fight on a draw because he had the advantage of the heavy wooden sword. If he is using Bloodwave to fight him, he will be badly defeated for sure. Thus, he did not feel any sense of true happiness. In fact, his legs are still trembling uncontrollably.

Opposite him, Prince Dan nodded at him to show his gratitude for Xiang Shaolong taking revenge on Guan Zhongxie on his behalf.

Guan Zhongxie returned to Lu Buwei's table with an expressionless face and received compliments with a silent nod. Although he has a look of disappointment on his face, in actual fact, he has become the second man after Wang Jian to match Xiang Shaolong's fighting skills. As a result, his status is now elevated.

Everybody around them are debating among themselves and refused to leave the banquet area. Zhu Ji saw that the banquet has become a chaotic debating ground and announced that the banquet has come to an end. After Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji have taken their leave, Xiang Shaolong returned back to his own tent.

Ji Yanran and the ladies inspected his injury and discover that the wound has reopened and blood is pouring out. They hurriedly applied a fresh coat of medicine and tie a new bandage over the wound.

Still in high spirits, Jing Jun, Zhao Zhi and Wu Tingfang are still discussing about the heart-stopping battle.

Xiang Shaolong enquired about Teng Yi from Ji Yanran. He learnt that Teng Yi has set off the moment the banquet started. Xiang Shaolong sighed, "Guan Zhongxie is really a top swordsman and he has the strength and power match his skills. It is not that I do not want to kill him but I am truly not capable of doing so."

Jing Jun smiled, "But he still cannot overpower you."

Ji Yanran shook her head, "Little Jun is mistaken. Guan Zhongxie failed to win tonight because from the very beginning, he did not fight with his full potential. After all, he believed that Hubby will die tomorrow. Why should he kill Hubby and earn the wrath of the Qin people?"

Everyone listened to her explanation and their expressions become serious. In this case, even if Guan Zhongxie cannot defeat Xiang Shaolong, he can still match him evenly in a fight.

Zhao Zhi added, "But the onlookers do not know this. I believed that everyone, including Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie are thinking that Hubby does not want to marry Lu Nianrong. Therefore, when he is gaining the upper hand, he suddenly stopped and wanted to defend instead. Even until now, they still do not comprehend Hubby's trickery."

Pleased, Ji Yanran reminded, "Zhi Zhi speaks with reason. This fight has benefitted us in some ways despite creating some problems too. Hubby must work harder. Sooner or later, Guan Zhongxie will use Lu Nianrong as an excuse to challenge you again. If you can add more power to the strange and fast swordplay, I am sure Guan Zhongxie will ultimately succumb to you."

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization. If he can get the Yue blacksmith to forge a samurai sword for him, that will be wonderful.

In this instant Huan Qi, who was out on patrol duty suddenly rushed into the tent. He came to Xiang Shaolong's side and whispered, "Lord Gaoling's men have started to take action."

In Xiao Pan's tent, Huan Qi has just finished his latest report on the movements of Lord Gaoling's rebel army. When he was about to continue with his analysis, Xiang Shaolong interrupted him, "What does Crown Prince think about the enemies' actions?"

Li Si's face glowed with admiration. Xiang Shaolong is the only man in the Qin Court who understands the Crown Prince way better than anyone else.

Xiang Shaolong found it hilarious. He has two kinds of feelings towards Xiao Pan. On one hand, he is the person who watched Xiao Pan grow up and is familiar with his character. Xiao Pan became a changed person when his mother Lady Ni committed suicide after being raped. Filled with revenge and suspicions, he is hungry for power to ensure his survival. Even towards Xiang Shaolong whom he trusted the most, he will still think about Xiang Shaolong's recommendation before going along with the idea. On the other hand, Xiang Shaolong knew that one day, Xiao Pan will be the powerful Qin Shihuang who unites the whole of China. Because of this, he has absolute trust in his capabilities unlike other people who continue to treat him like an immature youngster.



With these two factors combined, Xiang Shaolong is full of love and respect for Xiao Pan, trying his best to create opportunities for him to grow and learn.

Xiao Pan is delighted, "Subject Huan is well-informed of the enemy's situation. I will remember this. When everything is over, I will reward you handsomely."

Overjoyed, Huan Qi kowtowed and thanked him profusely, thinking that the Crown Prince is indeed an extraordinary man. If he said the same thing to Wang Jian, he will be more than happy if Wang Jian gives an approving nod. The chance of him getting a reward is even lesser.

After a short contemplation, Xiao Pan predicted, "Since Lord Gaoling is shifting his men downriver, they are likely to attack us with more than just fire or water. Since our forces are much bigger than his, I am certain that he will create different scenarios and throw us into disarray so that he can create an opportunity to overcome us."

Huan Qi saw how this teenage Crown Prince is making such a rational analysis and is full of admiration for his brilliance. His happiness in serving a capable ruler like Xiao Pan is written all over his face. The sincere glow in his eyes is far more effective than any common flattery. He did not even display such an emotional expression when facing Xiang Shaolong.

His confidence swelling, Xiao Pan thought for another few seconds before adding, "Lord Gaoling's first move is to set his own tents on fire. With the wind blowing the flames, the

fire will burn upwards. The first tents to be burnt down will be those behind the wooden defending gates. He can easily shoot a few fire arrows across the defending gates and the royal tents will start burning too. To ensure the safety of the Empress and the Royal Family, everyone will head towards the Jing River. Once everyone crosses the river, the danger is over.”

After his presentation, even Xiang Shaolong is pleasantly surprised. This future Qin Shihuang is truly formidable and can envision the battle as if he is there to see it personally. Before the fire attack, Lord Gaoling’s men can spray the tents and the ground with oil. Once the fire starts to burn, it will be an unstoppable inferno. If news of his rebellion wasn’t leaked to them, Lord Gaoling does have a high chance of success.

Xiao Pan explained the crux of the problem, “Lord Gaoling’s main goal is to get me. He will definitely dress up his own men as palace guards and plant them in strategic locations to assassinate me whenever possible. This is also another reason for him to create as much chaos as possible.”

Li Si and Huan Qi are smart enough not to interrupt him and allowed him to share all his thoughts. Xiang Shaolong intentionally inquired, “Crown Prince, in your opinion, what are the possible tricks Lord Gaoling has up his sleeves?”

Xiao Pan gladly replied, “He will still use a water flood attack. Lord Gaoling will purposely exaggerate the fire situation and coerced the royal family and all the important officials to run

for the opposite shore. When everyone is in a panic and rushing over the bridges, he will release the dams upriver. Adding heavy logs to the flood water, the bridges will be submerged by the water or smashed up by the logs. If I am on the bridge, Lord Gaoling's scheme would have succeeded immediately. If not, he would still have succeeded in dividing our armies into two. By then, the rebel army will attack us. If they shoot fire arrows at us, it will make the situation even more chaotic. Among the confusion, he can assassinate me. It is the most poisonous scheme I have ever come across."

Huan Qi is full of praise, "The Crown Prince is awesome! You have my full respect."

Xiao Pan intimately continued, "During that time, Lu Buwei will send his killers and his divers to kill whoever he wants. In addition, Subject Xiang will die of poisoning and the Cavalry Army will be leaderless. In the end, Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie can claim their rewards for fighting off the rebels. At the same time, they will take over the main military command from the dead Lu Gong and Xu Xian. Our Great Qin will end up in their hands. Hng!"

The three men understood Xiao Pan's meaning. Lu Buwei is making use of Lord Gaoling's rebellion to kill whoever he wants. After Lord Gaoling's rebellion has failed, all the credit and power will go to him. Lord Gaoling will die as a muddle-headed scapegoat.

Mo Ao's schemes are really chilling to the bone. Fortunately, he will be dying tomorrow. Otherwise, Xiang Shaolong will

die under his poisonous hands sooner or later. This is all fated, just like fate will create a Qin Shihuang.

Before the sun is up, the hunting groups have set off for their morning hunt. Prince Dan and his men are not participating as a sign of protest at Lu Buwei's humiliation.

Lu Buwei is in high spirits. He waved good morning to Xiang Shaolong happily as he believed that Xiang Shaolong's life will end today. When Guan Zhongxie ran into Xiang Shaolong, his previous air of confidence is much reduced and he no longer has the look of contempt on his face. It was replaced by twenty percent of respect and thirty percent of regret.

For a man as highly skilled as Guan Zhongxie, it is hard for him to find a worthy opponent. Now that he has found a worthy competitor in Xiang Shaolong, he will also lose him at the same time due to the poisoning. Thus Guan Zhongxie is in a dilemma and regrets that he will never have the chance to defeat this Qin Number One Swordsman.

Zhu Ji, Qin Qing and Ji Yanran were all absent from the morning hunt. As Xiao Pan's party is leisurely hunting for the sake of hunting, they decided to return to camp earlier.

The remaining hunters continued their hunt.

On the way back, Lu Nianrong intentionally rode to Xiang Shaolong's side and shot a vicious look at Li Si. Terrified, Li Si made up an excuse and took his leave by slowing down his horse. When Li Si is out of earshot, she scolded, "Xiang Shaolong! Did you purposely end the fight on a draw instead

of winning it so that you do not have to marry someone you hated?"

Xiang Shaolong was agonized. This daughter of his arch enemy is stubborn and long winded. She already mentioned that she is unwilling to marry him and knew that he will not live past tonight; why did she come up now and accuse him of hating her? But he also learnt that she does have some feelings for him. Otherwise, she would not have bothered to come and make things difficult for him.

He bitterly replied, "Things are beyond my control. Strictly speaking, I have lost because my wound did reopen in the end. But I did not say it as I do not want to give up the opportunity to fight for your hand in marriage! Does Third Mistress understand my feelings?"

Lu Niangrong's face turned red under his staring. Initially, her face brightened up before darkening again. She lowered her head and bit her lips as if she is trying to say something but held herself back. Xiang Shaolong guessed that her conscience is being pricked and is fearful that she may spill the beans about the poison pill. He was about to interrupt her when in front of them, Lu Buwei is waving at her to join him. Besides Lu Buwei is Mo Ao and he appears to share Xiang Shaolong's fear as well.

Lu Niangrong shot him another look and sighed softly before she rode ahead to join her father. At this point, Lord Changwen rode up to him and bitterly laughed, "Official Xiang can forget about our proposal last night. I spoke to

Ying Ying about marrying you last night but was rejected despite my continuous pleading. Ai! Love cannot be forced. Nonetheless, my brother and I are very grateful towards you.”

Xiang Shaolong did not feel threatened but felt more relaxed instead. He secretly thought that Guan Zhongxie must have made her felt very good in bed. Without trying out his own love making skills first, she will not marry him. To think that he has to fight Guan Zhongxie on the battlefield and also on bed! Honestly speaking, he is not as jealous as before. She can marry whoever she wants and he is not in the least interested.

Back at the camps, Xiang Shaolong has just finished instructing his men to protect his wives when Lu Gong sent someone to summon him.

In Lu Gong’s tent, Xu Xian, Wang He and a few other loyal military leaders are having a secret discussion. Even Bai Chong who lost to Zhou Zihen is also present.

With a pleased expression, Lu Gong sat down beside him and intimately pat his shoulder, praising, “Shaolong put up a good fight last night and forced Guan Zhongxie to retreat like a coward. You even interrupted that traitorous Premier Mentor who tried to end the fight halfway. You have earned my respect. If you ever lead an army to war, you will be invincible.”

Wang He frowned, “Why didn’t you take the chance to kill Guan Zhongxie last night? If he hides in the shadows and

ambushed us with his arrows, I am afraid we will all die an unexplainable death.”

Xiang Shaolong understood that Guan Zhongxie’s marvellous archery skills have startled the whole of Qin. Since he created a favourable impression last night that he is a better fighter than Guan Zhongxie, he will hide the truth about his own inability to kill him.

He bitterly smiled, “Because my wound reopened, I was forced to defend instead of attack. Regarding Guan Zhongxie’s archery skills, I am afraid he will not get any chance to use them tonight.”

He proceeded to reveal Xiao Pan’s assessment of Lord Gaoling. In the same breath, he added, “For this battle, the Crown Prince will be the main leader and we will just act according to his orders!”

Lu Gong sighed, “In my lifetime, I have served five different Kings but none of them have the strength, wisdom and capability of the present Crown Prince. There is hope for us. I wonder if I can live to see the day the Crown Prince unite the world.”

Xiang Shaolong is relieved to hear his words. Xiao Pan’s daily performances plus the fact that he is not related to Lu Buwei has won him the loyalty of the Qin military. With this backing alone, he will succeed the throne without much difficulty.

Xu Xian praised, “Despite his young age, Crown Prince has performed well and is full of courage and intellect. He is like a hidden gem. Although the two late Kings have been

poisoned to death and the state is in peril, we now have a capable leader to guide us. It is truly our good fortune!"

After Wang He praised Xiao Pan too, he added, "It is easy to deal with Lord Gaoling but Mo Ao will be assisting Lu Buwei in his scheming. I am concerned that there will be some unexpected attacks which will take us by surprise. Why is Shaolong not paying any attention to Lu Buwei?"

Xiang Shaolong explained, "To win every battle, you must know yourself and your enemy well. We have full information about Lord Gaoling's plans and have made accommodations for Lu Buwei's family warriors. After Mo Ao dies of poisoning, we will all be safe from his scheming. Under the leadership of the Crown Prince, Lu Buwei cannot salvage the situation even if Sun Wu comes back to life."

Xu Xian suggested, "Shall we lay a trap to bait Lu Buwei? We can use this opportunity to get rid of him. If there is ample evidence, Meng Ao cannot obstruct us from executing him."

Just as Xiang Shaolong was feeling a big headache coming, luckily, Lu Gong protested, "If we wanted to deal with Lu Buwei at the same time, it will make things even more complicated and I don't think we are up to it. Now, the two bastards Cai Ze and Wang Wan are supporting this damn Premier Mentor. If we failed to succeed, we may be counterattacked by him. With the Empress supporting him, I am afraid we will be the ones to suffer in the end. Old Xu, you must be more patient. Don't forget that we still have to watch out for Du Bi and his powerful men."



Wang He added, "Now, Meng Ao is leading the Qin army to the three new eastern provinces. He is fiercely loyal to Lu Buwei. If he knows that we are going after Lu Buwei, he may rebel and even declare the three provinces to be independent from Qin. When that happens, we'll be in deep shit."

Xu Xian sighed loudly but did not insist any further. Xiang Shaolong is beginning to understand this thing called fate. He has a chance to kill Lu Buwei right now but cannot do so because of circumstances. After further discussions, Lu Gong, Xu Xian and Wang He left to see Xiao Pan. To avoid drawing attention to himself, Xiang Shaolong did not go along and left on his own.

The minute he came out of the tent, he came face to face with Lu Dan'er and Ying Ying. The two ladies must have had an enjoyable hunt judging from the happy expressions on their faces. They noticed that Xiao Shaolong is alone and their eyes lit up. Lu Dan'er playfully cajoled, "Good Morning, Superman!"

Because she had rejected his marriage proposal, Ying Ying awkwardly remarked, "I was about to look for you."

She faced Lu Dan'er and begged, "Dan'er! Can you let me say something to Superman first?"

Lu Dan'er opposed, "You cannot keep him for yourself!"

And whispered into her ears, "Have a good talk!"

Ying Ying helplessly dragged Xiang Shaolong two steps away and whispered into his ears, "It is not that I do not want to marry you but this is all too sudden. Can you give me more time to consider?"

Xiang Shaolong felt that she is actually trying to stall for time for Guan Zhongxie and shot her a dirty look.

Ying Ying stomped her foot, scolding, "Don't let your imagination run wild. I am not that kind of person that you think I am!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed, "If you really want to reject me, you can find all kinds of excuses. In the future, I will not pay any more attention to you. Please forgive me for being cruel."

Ying Ying was stunned and stared at him without blinking. Lu Dan'er intercepted in and detained Xiang Shaolong, whining, "Come! Let's go fishing. I wonder why everybody is behaving so strangely today. Even that playful monkey Little Jun says he has no time to keep us company. But Official Xiang can take his place!"

Even if Xiang Shaolong is free, he is not keen to fool around with them. Moreover, today is an important day for everyone. He did his best to coax them before slipping away.

## CHAPTER 3

### A Happy Turn Of Events

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

JUST before noon, the hunting groups are making their way back to the camps and the atmosphere has become much livelier.

The palace guards and the cavalry army, taking charge of the internal and external security respectively, are quietly moving into their positions to counter the imminent rebellion.

On the whole, everything looks just the same. They will not make any large manpower deployments so as not to raise the alarm and alert Lord Gaoling's men.

Jing Jun has become Xiao Pan's chief intelligence officer. With a group of Wu Family Elite Warriors, they have formed an intelligence network spying on Lord Gaoling and Lu Buwei's activities.

There are no intelligence reports yet as Lord Gaoling will not dare to act before the night hunt has begun. Moreover, it will be ridiculous if he tried to set the camp on fire in broad daylight.

At lunchtime, the camp is reasonably peaceful.

The night hunters have retired back to their tents to get some rest so as to be in tip top condition later.

Time passed slowly.

When the horn is being sounded, the hunting groups start to gather at the main assembly ground. Finally, the air is filled with excitement again.

Xiao Pan, Zhu Ji and the high ranking officials are watching the hunting groups from an inspection platform. As the hunters begin to set off for the hunt, those who knew about the rebellion are feeling more and more stressful.

Ying Ying and her female warriors have left to join the night hunt as well.

The sun gradually descended behind the western mountains.

The campsite torches are being lighted up and there is smoke in all directions. Within the defending gates, it is bustling with activities as the palace guards are setting up the place for the dinner banquet.

Prince Dan and his men have abruptly left for Xianyang City. Although this is something Lu Buwei did not expect, his suspicions were not raised. After all, they were ridiculed at the banquet last night and probably do not want to embarrass themselves again.

In the semi-darkness, the action has secretly begun.

The first column to move is the Cavalry Army led by Huan Qi. Half of them quietly swam across the Jing River and took up strategic positions on both sides of the river. No one is allowed to leave their position to prevent any leakage of information.

Within the campsite, the palace guards have silently increased their defences at the Royal Tents.

Jing Jun's intelligence unit has finally come to life. Everything that is happening inside and outside the camp cannot escape their detection. These men have undergone strict and rigorous intelligence gathering training taught personally by Xiang Shaolong. To them, this is a task that they have been well-prepared for.

Before they entered the banquet area, Xiang Shaolong and Lu Gong stood on a slope outside the wooden gates. They were in great spirits as they enjoy the wind blowing against

their skin and looking at the vast landscape before their eyes.

Lu Gong sighed, "After Bai Qi, we lack a capable general who can lead our army to countless victories. Now that we have Shaolong, I can finally rest easy."

Xiang Shaolong humbly asked, "Lu Gong has been praising me non-stop. Since I came to Qin, I have yet to fight a single battle. What makes you think I will be a capable general?"

Lu Gong laughed, "You can judge a man accurately from small details. When Bai Qi first came about, he took care of every big and small detail just you. Everyone was full of admiration and his men fought hard under his leadership. Shaolong may not have fought a proper war yet but you have everyone submitting to you and willing to lay down their lives for you. This is a basic requirement for every capable general."

Pausing for a while, he added, "The first step to becoming a great general is soldier management. From your carefree appearance, I can tell that you are well-versed in soldiering. If laws are not enforced, there will be disorder; If training is insufficient, soldiers cannot fight; If you are carefree because you are well-prepared, you can fight ten thousand battles and win every one of them. So from Shaolong's carefree and well-prepared outlook, I was reminded of Bai Qi in the good old days."

Xiang Shaolong was astounded. Lu Gong's words do make incredible sense. When he was fighting against Zhao Mu in

Handan City, he has Teng Yi and Jing Jun to help him, the elite warriors are well-trained and he has Pu Bu and Liu Chao as spies. When everything is properly planned, he was indeed relaxed and carefree. However, at that point in time, he did not realise that it is a sign of good soldiering!

In Sun Zi's Art of War, this is known as 'proper delegation of appropriate work to the appropriate person.'

Lu Gong became more enthusiastic and continued, "A born genius is only good enough to last one generation. There is no lack of talent; only lack of people who can recognize talent. There is no lack of people who can recognize talent, only lack of people who can use talented men effectively. I noticed that Shaolong has recommended Li Si, Huan Qi and Wang Jian to the Crown Prince and know that Shaolong's foresight is second to none. In the area, I am afraid even Bai Qi is not your match."

Xiang Shaolong was feeling guilty at this undeserved praise.

They were interrupted by a palace guard who came to invite them inside the defending gates for the banquet. Thus, their conversation came to an end.

The sun has finally disappeared behind the western mountain.

Mo Ao is about to die.

As per normal, the banquet is extremely lively. As expected, Lord Gaoling has given an excuse to skip the banquet.

Ji Yanran and all the ladies are here, sharing a table with Qin Qing. They came here with the intention to watch a good show. After all, the safest place is here within the defending gates.

All the high ranking officials, including Xiao Pan are all dressed in their hunting outfits. This is the last banquet and according to the Qin customs, the banquet will last throughout the night while waiting for the night hunters to come back by dawn tomorrow.

Jing Jun, Huan Qi and Lord Changwen have their duties to attend to and were absent from the banquet.

Xiao Pan is very energetic and his two eyes are shining brightly, showing his excited mood.

Lu Buwei is in his usual great spirits and frequently toasted and chatted with Zhu Ji.

Mo Ao surprisingly showed up for the banquet and is seated at the back with Lu Chan and Zhou Zihen. It may be due to his desire to see Xiang Shaolong dying before his own eyes or that he need not conceal himself any further.

Seated between Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie, Lu Nianrong kept her head lowered throughout the banquet and did not even take a single look at Xiang Shaolong.

After a group of palace guards performed an exciting sword dance and the air is filled with enthusiastic clapping, one of Jing Jun's fellow villagers Jing Shan came up to Xiang Shaolong's back and reported in a low voice, "Lord Gaoling's



men are beginning to spray oil on the tents behind the defending gates. Master Jun has intentionally sent some men to patrol the area so only a limited area is affected.”

Xiang Shaolong whispered back, “What about Lu Buwei’s men?”

Jing Shan replied, “There are three hundred family warriors from Lu Buwei’s side who have left the camp and dived into the Jing River. Master Jun is sure that they will begin to kill Lu Buwei’s enemies when the water attack has broken up the bridges and everyone is in a state of panic.”

When Jing Shan left, Xiang Shaolong remarked to Lord Changping beside him, “Bro! It is time!”

Lord Changping exchanged a thrilled look with him and quietly left his seat. On the other side, Li Si moved closer to Xiang Shaolong and whispered, “From Lu Buwei’s expression, he must be feeling puzzled because you have yet to show any signs of poisoning. Hei! This is interesting!”

Pausing, he added, “There is something I still do not understand. Lu Buwei knowingly allowed Lord Gaoling to run amok. Isn’t he afraid that he may be killed by Lord Gaoling among the confusion?”

Xiang Shaolong observed that Zhou Zihen and Lu Chan have left their seats. He smiled, “Firstly, there must be Lu Buwei’s spies among Lord Gaoling’s men so Lu Buwei already has a clear idea of Lord Gaoling’s ambush plans. Although Lu Buwei only has an escort of about one hundred men, he has another batch of men who will slip in during the confusion.

When I die of poisoning, Guan Zhongxie will take over my Cavalry Army. All Lu Buwei need to do is to stand beside the Empress and the Crown Prince. With Mo Ao giving him advice on the spot, everyone will have to listen to his commands.”

He sighed, “He must take some risks to gain the benefits.”

Li Si cannot hold back his laughter, “This is so complicated and I have never thought of that. Hei! Look at the Crown Prince’s alert expression. Last night, he only slept for several hours and today is such a busy day. Despite all that, he is still looking fresh and vigilant. The late King is much weaker compared to him.”

Xiang Shaolong agreed. The most successful people are always the most energetic people. Otherwise, they cannot handle the multi-tasking and associated stress. Xiao Pan is Qin Shihuang and his energy level is surely higher than ordinary people.

At this moment, Guan Zhongxie left his seat and took a detour to Lao Ai’s table, engaging him in a conversation.

Xiang Shaolong nearly wanted to send someone to eavesdrop on them but suppressed this desire. He wondered if Lao Ai’s name is on Lu Buwei’s assassination list?

Jing Shan came again to report, “From the light signals, Lord Gaoling’s men hiding upriver have pushed giant logs and rafts into the water. When the camp catches fire, they will lead a coordinated attack. Zhou Zihen and Lu Chan have left the campsite. One of them is heading towards the Jing River

while the other one is likely to be liaising with another group of Lu Buwei's family warriors. Master Jun has instructed Pu Bu to trail him. If they tried to do anything funny, they will be killed without question."

After Jing Shan departed, Xiang Shaolong leaned towards Li Si and informed "It is time. Official Li must alert the Crown Prince now. I will go and have some fun with Lu Buwei."

The two men left to carry out their tasks. After finishing his deployment, Lord Changping came back and ran into Xiang Shaolong. He updated, "All the members of the royal family have been transported to a safe place and everything is going as planned. Now, I will protect Empress and Crown Prince. Shaolong must be careful."

Both men exchanged a smile and went on their separate ways.

Xiang Shaolong took a detour and came to Lao Ai's and Guan Zhongxie's side, smiling, "What are the two of you talking about? Both of you looked so happy."

In actual fact, both men are speaking with a serious expression on their faces and there was no sign of happiness. Hearing his inverse description, they know that Xiang Shaolong has a hidden meaning in his words.

Guan Zhongxie smiled awkwardly, "Without Official Xiang, our conversation is indeed boring. Come! Let's have a drink or two!"

Their table is three tables away from Lu Buwei's table. But as Xiang Shaolong, Guan Zhongxie and Lao Ai were all well-built men; they managed to distract a surprised Lu Buwei who is speaking with Zhu Ji.

Xiang Shaolong raised his head and looked at the crescent moon high up in the sky. He shook his head, "The sky is dark tonight which makes it favourable for a sneak attack. I am in charge of security and I should not drink. Official Guan, please forgive me!"

Despite Guan Zhongxie's iron nerves, his face changed colour slightly.

An ignorant Lao Ai smiled, "With Xiang Shaolong here, any attackers will suffer a huge defeat."

Xiang Shaolong decided to use this opportunity to erode more of Guan Zhongxie's confidence. He deliberately commented, "There are many strange occurrences in this world that can happen unexpectedly. One cannot change the will of Fate. Does Official Guan agree with what I said?"

Guan Zhongxie is feeling really uneasy. When his face lost even more colour, Xiang Shaolong left with a smile on his face.

Xiang Shaolong walked towards Lu Buwei and Mo Ao.

His mind is filled with endless thought and countless emotions.

Since the tragic death of Princess Qian and the four maids, he has always been suffering at Lu Buwei's hands. All the

anger and pain is hidden deep in his heart and he has suffered greatly.

When Wu Tingwei is executed due to Lu Buwei's bribery and his beloved King Zhuangxiang died from Lu Buwei's poisoning, his biggest wish is to insert a knife into Lu Buwei's body.

But since he knew that Lu Buwei will live for a few more years, his passionate wish has transformed into a deep pain.

Although he managed to remove Lu Xiong from his official post, it only vented a small part of his frustration. He did not feel a great sense of satisfaction yet.

But today will be different. Because Mo Ao is going to die.

Without Mo Ao, Lu Buwei may not use such a devious scheme to harm him. Since there is no way to be sure, Mo Ao is still considered as the main reason for his pain.

After tonight, he will not give Lu Buwei any face.

Only when he brings out his full potential can he last until the day when Xiao Pan is coroneted.

Before Mo Ao dies, he must make fun of Lu Buwei and Mo Ao as a way of venting his frustration.

With this thought, he went to Mo Ao's table.

Sitting in front of him, Lu Buwei and Lu Niangrong turned around in astonishment. Lu Buwei smiled, "Shaolong is coming to drink with me?"

Zhu Ji turned her attention to Xiang Shaolong and was baffled at his solemn expression.

Guan Zhongxie followed Xiang Shaolong to Mo Ao's table. Observing that he is coldly staring at Mo Ao, his face lost more colour.

The lively banquet is still carrying on with wine drinking contests, chatting and joking. Lu Gong, Xu Xian and Wang He have received their secret signal and slipped away one by one.

Xiao Pan is behaving normally and is having a conversation with Zhu Ji. However, their eyes are focused on Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong scanned Lu Buwei and Lu Nianrong before the corner of his mouth curled up in a smile, "I am here to present my thanks to Mister Mo."

Even with Mo Ao's intelligence, he has no idea what Xiang Shaolong is talking about. Nonetheless, he was taken aback and stood up in surprise, asking, "Why is Official Xiang thanking me?"

The banquets of Qin are casual and informal. There are many people who are standing and challenging each other's wine capacity. Although the three men are standing and talking, it did not attract any attention. Moreover, they are standing at one of the rear tables.

Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan have stopped speaking and are listening intently to their conversation.

Lu Buwei also felt that something is amiss. He stood up with a wine cup and came in between them, inquiring, "What does Shaolong want to thank Mister Mo for? I am also interested to find out!"

Xiang Shaolong took a glance at Guan Zhongxie who has a suspicious look on his face before officially stating, "First, I want to thank Mister Mo for getting Drunken Wind Brothel owner Mister Wu Fu to give me Flying Dragon. In the future, I will use it to kill my enemies on the battlefield to express my gratitude."

'Dang!'

Lu Buwei's hand trembled and his wine cup fell down to the ground, shattering into pieces.

The three men's countenance changed instantly.

Xiang Shaolong looked at the broken pieces of the wine cup and broke out into laughter, "On the ground, a flower blooms. Wealth and riches to follow. That's a good sign. I pray that Premier Mentor will live to a hundred years and enjoy great health."

With these words, the three men buckled. Even Zhu Ji's expression changed drastically as she can sense that something is very wrong.

Mo Ao suspiciously questioned, "How am I related to Brothel Owner Wu Fu who gave Official Xiang the precious spear?"

Lu Buwei's face darkened. When Xiang Shaolong wished him to live to a hundred years, he is obviously stating the

reverse. Thinking that Xiang Shaolong will soon die of poisoning, he will not clash with him in front of Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan.

Cai Ze, Wang Wan and a few other guests from the neighbouring tables are starting to notice their exchange. All of them have stopped their activities and are looking in their direction.

Xiao Pan is certain that Xiang Shaolong is creating an opportunity for him. He excused himself and left.

Lu Buwei and the others knew that Xiao Pan is leaving but as Xiang Shaolong has their full attention with his shocking statements, they could not be bothered about other matters.

A cold murderous look flashed past Xiang Shaolong's eyes. He stared at Mo Ao and interrogated, "The wisest man will slip one day. I only mentioned that I was given Flying Dragon but did not say what it is. How did Mister Mo know that it is a precious spear?"

When Mo Ao is speechless after realising his mistake, Guan Zhongxie enquired in a deep voice, "What is the second thing that Official Xiang wants to thank Mister Mo for?"

Xiang Shaolong faced the sky and laughed, "Of course it is for Miss Guiyan's kiss. Mister Mo has kissed her many times and should know better than me."

The three men lost control and the faces were drained of colour.



Mo Ao is truly a genius. Clutching his throat, he coughed, "You..."

Xiang Shaolong continued looking at the sky and sighed, "It is almost time. Mister Mo's calculations are infallible. You should know the exact time of your death."

His eyes shining icily, he indicated to Mo Ao and state one word slowly after another, "When you count others, don't forget to count yourself. Does Mister Mo understand the meaning of these words?"

Lu Buwei coldly snorted, "Shaolong!"

Xiang Shaolong coldly faced him and shot back in a deep voice, "Where are Zhou Zihen and Lu Chan? It is very chaotic outside. I hope they don't get killed in the confusion."

Lu Buwei's face darkened even further and roared, "Commander Xiang, what do you mean by these words?"

'Yah!'

The colour on Mo Ao's face is changing rapidly. With his two hands clutching his throat, he kept coughing but cannot say a single word. His eyes were filled with dread.

Petrified, Guan Zhongxie rushed forward and supported him, asking, "What is going on?"

Mo Ao shivered for a while and large beads of perspiration is flowing down from his forehead. In the corner of his mouth, blood is seen trickling out. It was a hideous scene.

Xiang Shaolong threatened Guan Zhongxie, “Official Guan had better stay right here. Otherwise, do not blame me when I punished you for AWOL<sup>3</sup>.”

He faced Lu Buwei and plainly smiled, “This sky is dark tonight. Premier Mentor must be careful when he crosses the bridge.”

When Mo Ao collapsed into Guan Zhongxie’s arms, Xiang Shaolong has already left a long time ago.

Torches and war cries can be detected simultaneously from the direction of the river. The first rebellion since Xiao Pan took over Qin has finally begun.

---

<sup>3</sup> AWOL = Absence Without Leave

## CHAPTER 4

## Lifetime's First Victory

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

WHILE all the Qin officials and Royal Family members are in a state of panic, Xiao Pan, under the escort of Xu Xian, Lu Gong and Wang He, gracefully returned back to his seat. He loudly commanded, "Lord Gaoling has rebelled. I will now personally lead the fight against his rebel army. All of you can remain in your seats for the time being. After I have taken care of him, I will come back and drink with all of you again."

Although everyone is alarmed by the loud shouting and fire burning, they are situated safely within the defending gates and noticed that the palace guards around them are all armed and well-prepared. Calming down, they cheered loudly for Xiao Pan.

Zhu Ji stood up and had a quick look at the pale-faced Lu Buwei and Guan Zhongxie who is supporting a dying Mo Ao. She questioned, "Crown Prince! What is going on?"

Xiao Pan coldly replied, "Empress can rest assured as I am in control. Men! Escort Empress back to the tent for a rest."

Zhu Ji understood that given the present circumstances, it is not suitable to ask any further questions from her elusive son. Still at a loss, she left under the escort of the palace guards cum palace maids and returned back to her tent.

Xiao Pan faced Lu Buwei, assuring, "Premier Mentor and Third Mistress must have suffered a shock. Please have a rest in my tent. When the rebellion has been quashed, I will invite both of you out for a celebratory drink."

Lu Buwei glanced at the wheezing Mo Ao helplessly. A dozen palace guards came up to him and invited him to rest in the main Royal Tent.

Loud crashing sounds can be heard from the direction of River Jing as the giant logs collided into the bridges. Sounds of water rushing down the river can also be heard, pushing the fear in everyone's heart to the maximum.

But after looking at Xiao Pan's confident composure and swift issue of military orders, everyone was slightly comforted.

Lu Buwei knew that if he disobeyed his instructions, he will lose his head on the execution ground. Sighing, he took a last look at Guan Zhongxie and Mo Ao before he left with Lu Niangrong.

By now, the palace guards have prepared the warhorses. Xiao Pan pacified the banquet guests one more time and mounted his warhorse. Under the protection of the three generals and the palace guards, he courageously galloped out of the defending gates.

Mo Ao finally breathed his last.

Guan Zhongxie's body went numb. For the first time, he can feel the real fear of having Xiang Shaolong as his enemy.

Tonight, they have suffered multiple defeats. Lu Buwei and Lu Niangrong are as good as under house arrest. Mo Ao is poisoned to death and he has lost his bearings. If he tried to leave the banquet area, he will die an unexplainable death under the hands of the palace guards.

At the same time, he knew that Lu Chan and Zhou Zihen were as good as dead. Xiang Shaolong will never let them off.

When the fire attack has just begun, the Lord Changping brothers led five thousand of their palace guards into Lord Gaoling's rebel army camp and began a killing spree.

The fire fighters have prepared wet sand in advance and hid them among the grass and the trees. They managed to prevent the fire from spreading.

When Lord Gaoling tried to attack the campsite with three thousand soldiers, they discovered that they have been surrounded by Xiao Pan's army. Like a trapped beast, they fought a losing battle.

Leading two thousand cavalry soldiers, Jing Jun intercepted a group of Lu Buwei's family warriors led by Lu Chan. He fired a string of arrows and killed many of their men and horses before he attacked them using a pincer formation. It was an onslaught.

At this point in time, all the four bridges haven been smashed to smithereens. As another army of rebel soldiers ventured down river on wooden rafts, they were crushed by large rocks that were catapulted down by Huan Qi and his army of five thousand cavalry soldiers who were ambushing them from higher ground. Tragic cries filled the air.

Their shields may have helped if it was an arrow attack but it was large rocks that were being hurled at them. Moreover, there was nowhere they could hide in the middle of the river. More than a hundred rafts were squarely hit and they sank immediately. The rest of the rebels hurriedly rowed to the shore but were mercilessly slaughtered by another group of cavalry soldiers hiding among the trees.

With an air of authority, Xiao Pan travelled between the two battle sites and used torch signals to issue commands to his men.

Xiang Shaolong himself led another two thousand cavalry soldiers and conducted a search along the Jing River. He could not find any traces of Zhou Zihen and the divers. He guessed that they must have sensed that something is amiss and swam to the other side of the river and slipped away.

He could not help but sighed. Lu Buwei will survive this episode. If Zhou Zihen and the divers are apprehended, there will be sufficient evidence to nail Lu Buwei. Despite all his work, he cannot change the course of history. But what role does he play in this thing called fate?

Zhu Ji and Lu Buwei are invited to join the banquet again. Lu Gong and the other two generals are already seated at their tables.

Ji Yanran and the other ladies were overjoyed to see their beloved husband return safely. Even the aloof Qin Qing smiled sweetly at him.

All the officials kneeled down and paid their respects to Xiao Pan, pledging their loyalty to him. Xiao Pan is so overwhelmed that his face is totally red and he toasted them in return.

Xiang Shaolong is comforted. After tonight's event, Xiao Pan has secured an infallible position in the hearts of the people of Qin.

Jing Shan came up and reported, "Lu Chan managed to slip away. The people receiving him are from outside the capital and are definitely not Lu Buwei's family warriors."

Xiang Shaolong was forced to accept this fact. With Mo Ao's intelligence, they will not leave behind any traces of evidence.

Thinking about this, he could not help but looked towards Lu Buwei.

Mo Ao has been carted away and Guan Zhongxie is expressionless. However, Lu Buwei is acting as per normal and drinking happily with Xiao Pan and Zhu Ji. Xiang Shaolong gives him two thumbs up for his acting skills.

Shouting at the top of their voices, Lord Gaoling and his military leaders were dragged into the centre of the banquet ground. They were tightly bounded by strong ropes and were forced to kneel down by Lord Changping and the palace guards.

Everyone became silent.

Firstly, Xiao Pan asked Zhu Ji for instructions. Zhu Ji sighed, "You do as you deem fit."

Lord Gaoling's hair is untied and in a mess. With traces of blood on his clothes, his eyes were burning with hatred as he stared viciously at Xiao Pan.

A palace guard was about to press his head down in a kowtow when Xiao Pan stopped him. He plainly state, "You



tried to rebel and scheme against the rightful King. Lord Gaoling, do you realise your mistake?"

Lord Gaoling loudly scolded, "Pei! Since when is a bastard like you fit to call yourself..."

Before he finished his sentence, Lord Changping who is standing beside him stuffed a piece of cloth into his mouth. A palace guard on the other side hit him heavily on his back. Lord Gaoling moaned in pain and fell down to the ground. It was a pathetic sight.

Acting as if nothing has happened, Xiao Pan faced Lu Buwei and asked, "Premier Mentor, what is the punishment for staging a rebellion?"

Lu Buwei generously state, "It is punishable by death. The Crown Prince should lock him up behind bars and announce his crimes to the people. Then, you can proceed to execute him."

With everyone solemnly watching him, Xiao Pan nodded, "Premier Mentor speaks with reason. But there is no need to wait any longer before we execute them. Men! Bring all of them to the shore of River Jing and cut off their heads at once. Do not bury their bodies but let them lay exposed in the wilderness and be ravaged by wild beasts."

Nobody expected this teenage Crown Prince to be so ruthless. After all, Lord Gaoling is a member of the royal family. If not for King Zhuangxiang, he would have been the King of Qin. Now, he has to die in the wild without a proper

burial place. Everyone is shocked and subdued by the dominating character of this future Qin Shihuang.

Lord Gaoling raised his head in surprise. As his hands were bound and his mouth was stuffed, he is unable to protest.

Some of his conspirators were shaking with fear while some others have fainted on the spot.

Under Lord Changping's command, the palace guards dragged Lord Gaoling and his men out of the defending gates to be executed.

Maintaining his strict expression, Xiao Pan coldly added, "Arrest every family member of the rebels. The males shall be sent to work in the western territories and the females shall be palace maids. Every descendant of Lord Gaoling is to be arrested and executed without pardon. Let this serve as a warning to those people who harbour ill intentions."

Every Qin official was as quiet as a dormouse and it was so quiet you can even hear a pin drop.

Xiang Shaolong felt that Xiao Pan is too high-handed but when he noticed that everyone behaved normally, he realised that it is a common practice for the family members to be punished together with the criminal.

If it was Lord Gaoling who captured Xiao Pan, Xiao Pan and himself will suffer a similar fate.

There is nothing more that he can say.

This punishment method is one of the ways to maintain law and order. With such a harsh punishment, everyone will be a law-abiding citizen.

Xiao Pan continued, "The person who scored the most merit this time is Huan Qi who has just joined the Cavalry Army. He was the one who discovered the enemies' scheming which allowed me to prepare an effective counterattack. Now that we have successfully triumphed over our enemies, we must not forget his contribution. I will bypass the standard protocol and promote him to the rank of General. General Wang Jian did a good job of grooming him and also accomplished several feats in the northern war against the Xiong Nu. He shall be promoted to Great General with immediate effect."

Xiao Pan has proven himself by quelling the rebellion. Now that he is promoting the men who have fought well, there is no way Zhu Ji can intervene. Lu Buwei can only wallow in self misery.

Lu Gong, Xu Xian and Wang He have been consulted regarding these promotions. Obviously, they will not voice any opposition.

Huan Qi is now busy chasing after the remnants of the rebel army with Jing Jun. For the time being, this wonderful news has yet to reach him.

Xiao Pan words are partly true. His real motive is to adopt Xiang Shaolong's suggestion and use Huan Qi to set up a special elite force that will report directly to himself. In the

future, this will assist him greatly in countering Lao Ai and Lu Buwei.

Originally, Xiao Pan wanted to promote Xiang Shaolong to be a Great General too but was rejected by Xiang Shaolong because he lacked military contributions.

He is not interested in power and authority.

Xiao Pan continued, "General Huan Qi shall stay in the vicinity of the capital and construct training camps. He shall be tasked with training new soldiers that are drafted from all over Qin. This will aid us greatly when we set out to unite the world in the future. Wang Ben is a valiant fighter who killed the first twenty enemy soldiers. I will promote him to be General Huan Qi's Assistant General and they will work hand in hand to serve the nation. Empress, Premier Mentor, Lieutenant General, Great Generals and Officials, does anyone have anything to add?"

Zhu Ji can see that her precious son has finally grown up but the gap between them is widening day by day.

Xiang Shaolong is the main mastermind behind tonight's event and Lu Buwei has a part to play too with his scheming. However, both men did not tell her anything about their plans. Feeling dejected and lost, she cannot help but looked over to Lao Ai. Is he the only man that she can really depend on?

Xiao Pan repeated himself, "Empress! I am waiting for your instructions."

Suddenly, Zhu Ji felt that she is very tired of everything. She shook her head, "Crown Prince can make your own decisions."

Lu Buwei took this chance to cut in, "The Palace Guards, Imperial Cavalry and Imperial Infantry are more than enough to defend the capital. Why do we need another army? Will the Crown Prince please reconsider."

In his heart, Lu Gong is cursing, Damn you bitch! He chortled, "Premier Mentor's words have highlighted the problem. The Palace Guards, Imperial Cavalry and Imperial Infantry are limited to the capital defences. If there is any trouble in the vicinity of the capital, we will be at a loss. Take the uprising of the three eastern provinces as an example. All the Qin soldiers near the capital have been deployed away, providing Lord Gaoling with this opportunity to ambush us. It is absolutely necessary to create this new army."

Xu Xian added, "Now, the three allied states are hostile towards us. We have to face the harsh reality that we may have to fight them along the official roads. With this new army, we will not be afraid of any uprisings in the new eastern provinces."

Lu Buwei was flabbergasted.

This is his biggest flaw. He is an academic official. Without Meng Ao by his side, he is not fit to debate military matters with these Generals who have years of military experience.

The support of the Generals is extremely crucial for Xiao Pan.

Xiao Pan concluded, "It shall be decided then. Commander Xiang, receive your order."

Everyone was startled. What does Crown Prince want Xiang Shaolong to do?

Only Lu Gong, Li Si and the rest of the Great Generals know what is going on.

Xiang Shaolong left his table and went forward to Zhu Ji's and Xiao Pan's table, kneeling down.

Xiao Pan retrieved a token of authority which a palace guard helped to pass to Xiang Shaolong. He instructed, "Lord Gaoling managed to assemble an army with over ten thousand men and even brought them so close to Xianyang City. I am sure there is someone helping him in the background. I want Commander Xiang to leave the capital and investigate this matter. If you discover any men who are supporting the rebels, kill them without mercy. In your absence, Assistant Commander Jing will temporary assume your main duties."

In a loud voice, Xiang Shaolong accepted his command.

Xiao Pan barked, "The banquet shall end now. My dear Subjects, please have a good rest in the meantime. When the bridges have been repaired, we will go to the River Jing shore and await the night hunters to come back with their catch."

When Xiao Pan is sending Zhu Ji off, all the officials kneeled down respectfully and submissively.

In this moment, Xiang Shaolong is moved to tears.

All his years of hard work has finally paid off.

From tonight onwards, Xiao Pan will build his legacy as Qin Shihuang.

The authority of the Qin Court is no longer in the hands of the officials. Even Lu Buwei has to submit to him.

When he comes back after killing Tian Dan, he will sow discord between Lao Ai and Lu Buwei, making them fight among themselves.

After all that he has gone through, he should finally enjoy some peace of mind.

## CHAPTER 5

*Mysterious Attackers*

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

BY THE TIME the hunters returned from their night hunt, Xiang Shaolong has left with Ji Yanran, Zhao Zhi and the Eighteen Guardians. They rushed toward the Qin and Chu border to liaise with Teng Yi.

Since the death of Zhao Qian and the four maids, this is the first time he is enjoying true happiness.

Mo Ao is gone; Xiao Pan has the full support of the Qin military and even impressed the people of Qin in a successful battle.



Because of Lao Ai, Zhu Ji will be less supportive of Lu Buwei. With these turn of events, he should finally enjoy some days of peace.

However, there is still a scar left in his mind.

When he left with Zhao Qian and the other ladies on the last mission, he did not anticipate any danger to befall him. Out of a sudden, his nightmare began. It was only tonight when he defeated Lu Buwei soundly can he finally catch his breath. Still, he was fearful of the uncertain future.

Following the travelling path he had decided earlier with Teng Yi, they travelled as quickly as they can for seven days and seven nights. They crossed the Eastern Ridge and the terrain has become flatter. On this night, they set up camp and lit a campfire beside a small river.

Somehow, Xiang Shaolong is feeling very restless. He did not have any appetite for the food hunted by Wu Yanzhu, Jing Shan and the other Guardians.

Ji Yanran was surprised, "Is something bothering Hubby?"

Zhao Zhi smiled, "Are you thinking about Sister Fang and Bao'er?"

Xiang Shaolong eyed the cackling fire suspiciously and replied in a deep voice, "No. I am feeling very uneasy recently. In fact, this feeling came about when we left Xianyang City. Tonight, this feeling is even stronger than before."

Ji Yanran's face lost some colour and she warned, "Hubby is not an ordinary man. If you have this feeling, then something must be amiss."

She turned to the Guardians who are cooking some wild animals over the fire and asked, "Did you guys hear what he said?"

Jing Shan stood up, "Let's spy on our surroundings."

The Guardians respected Xiang Shaolong as if he is a deity. When they heard his words, everyone raised their self-awareness and left accordingly.

After the Guardians have left, Zhao Zhi remarked, "Logically speaking, there should not be anyone following us, especially Lu Buwei's men. Little Jun and the Palace Guards should be watching them closely and it is almost impossible for them to slip away and attack us. This is a complicated issue."

Ji Yanran gently asked, "Is it possible that Hubby's restlessness is due to other reasons? From the way it looks, it doesn't seem like anyone is following us!"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly smiled, "I am not a superhuman who can detect things that are happening far away from me. But after so many years of living in a dangerous environment, I am extra sensitive to ambushes or stalkers. We will have our answer soon enough. Jing Shan's nose is better than a hunting dog's nose."

Zhao Zhi weakly leaned into his bosom, whispering, "I am scared!"

Xiang Shaolong understands that she is thinking about that terrible night when Zhao Qian was killed. Hugging her shoulder to calm her fears down, he assured, "With me around, no one can harm you."

Ji Yanran looked up to the dark sky and softly commented, "If there is really somebody following us, then it is a valid reason for Hubby to feel extra restless tonight. After all, this area is generally flat and..."

"Ah....!!"

A tragic cry shattered the tranquillity of the wilderness, proving that Xiang Shaolong's worries are not unfounded.

Zhao Zhi's countenance changed, "Isn't that Wu Da's voice?"

Wu Da is one of the Guardians. He is known for his nimble limbs and his quick-wittedness. If he was ambushed just like this; either the enemy is very highly-skilled or the trap is very well-laid.

Xiang Shaolong and the two ladies jumped up on their feet. They proceeded to arm themselves and disengaged the horses from one another.

They dared not put out the fire or they will lose touch with the rest of the Guardians.

The burning fire serves to remind them about the impending danger because they are now the targets of some mysterious attackers.

Until now, they have no information about the enemies.

Suddenly, the Guardians returned in a state of panic and their faces are filled with grief. Wu Yanzhu is carrying Wu Da on his back. Wu Da was heavily injured with one arrow through his back and another arrow through the side of his body. He was breathing laboriously and his clothes are soaked with blood.

An emotional Zhao Zhi began to cry after seeing the usually energetic Wu Da so badly injured.

Wu Shu is about to put out the fire when Xiang Shaolong stopped him. He instructed, "Yanran, please stop the bleeding first. Break the arrow but do not touch the arrow head."

Before he finished speaking, Yanran is already trying her best to save Wu Da.

Wu Yanzhu and the other Guardians are close to Wu Da and their relationships are like real brothers. Their eyes turned red and they spat at the fire which betrayed their location.

Xiang Shaolong knew that this is a matter of life and death. He cannot afford to be careless. He calmly asked, "Who are they and how did they attacked you?"

Everyone's attention focused on Wu Yanzhu. Apparently, he and Wu Da are a team and they ran into the enemies together while the others did not run into any enemies.

Wu Yanzhu took a deep breath and suppressed his grief, explaining, "Wu Da and I headed to the east. Just when we wanted to climb a cliff and look down from there, the arrows were fired at us."

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed. The road to the east is the direction to Chu. In this case, the mysterious attackers may have surrounded them completely.

But it is pitch black now. He is certain that the enemy will not dare to attack them before the sun comes up tomorrow.

When the sun comes up tomorrow, they will all be killed.

Zhao Zhi suddenly cried out even harder. Everyone was shaken and looked down at Wu Da. True enough, Wu Da has stopped breathing.

Xiang Shaolong had a brainwave and prevented the Guardians from hugging Wu Da's corpse in grief. He hollered, "Let me do something first!"

He thought hard about emergency resuscitation in the 21st century.

Wu Da has always been strong and fit. Moreover, the arrow did not penetrate any of his organs. He has stopped breathing because he has lost too much blood and the heart has temporarily stopped pumping. It may be still possible to resuscitate him.

First, he laid Wu Da on a piece of flat ground and strongly pressed down on the area where his heart is. After several pushes, Wu Da's body shook once and he resumed breathing and his heart resumed pumping. In the end, Xiang Shaolong did not have to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Ji Yanran and everybody else were completely blown away. Exchanging glances at one another, no one can believe what they just witnessed. They even forgot to cheer at Wu Da's recovery.

Xiang Shaolong took out a dagger and warned Wu Da, "You mustn't fall asleep. If you do, you'll be dead."

Hardening his heart, he dug the arrowheads out with his dagger. Ji Yanran quickly applied some medicine to stop the bleeding.

Xiang Shaolong stood up and instructed his men to cut a few young trees to construct a stretcher. The Guardians saw that he can even bring a dead man back to life and can feel their confidence soaring. They viewed Xiang Shaolong like an immortal from heaven and their fighting spirit increased dramatically.

After Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi bandaged Wu Da's wounds, they came to Xiang Shaolong's side. Zhao Zhi was full of admiration, "Hubby is full of miracles. You can even bring a dead man back to life!"

Ji Yanran smiled, "I have seen so many of his outrageous methods that this is nothing new."

Her eyes scanning the pitch black surroundings, she whispered, "We have neglected somebody! Can Hubby guess who it is?"

Xiang Shaolong was pondering how to escape this impending attack. Hearing her words, he guessed, "Du Bi!"

Zhao Zhi exclaimed, "Ah!"

Ji Yanran deduced, "It must be him. Lord Gaoling's men and horses can reach such a short distance away from Xianyang City without any detection. It must be Du Bi supporting him."

Xiang Shaolong was hit by realization, "Now I understand. All along, he is watching from the sidelines. If Lord Gaoling is successful, he will try to reap some side benefits. Now, he thought that we are really out to look for rebels working with Lord Gaoling. He took this opportunity to trail us and tried to find a chance to kill us."

Ji Yanran softly sighed, "Since we never considered about this possibility, we have been too careless and ended up in the present situation. But I am certain that there are not too many men on our trail but they are all expert fighters."

Zhao Zhi's face turned pale and she bit her lip, "It will be daylight in another four hours. What shall we do?"

Wu Yanzhu and Jing Shan have constructed a stretcher and are using it to carrying Wu Da while waiting for Xiang Shaolong's instructions.

Xiang Shaolong leaned over and kissed Ji Yanran's face. He gladly commented, "Yanran's words have saved all of us."

He faced everyone and announced, "When the enemy tried to kill Wu Da with arrows, it is because they lacked manpower and cannot surround the forest to ambush us. They wanted to scare us into staying here."

Everyone's spirits lifted after hearing his words but were perplexed at the same time. It is pitch-dark everywhere. It is impossible for the enemy to attack them but it is equally impossible for them to escape because no one can see what is ahead of them.

Xiang Shaolong state in a deep voice, "If the enemy wishes to ambush us with limited soldiers, they will be based in high positions. We will slip away by walking in the river. Firstly, we will not lose our way and secondly, the high mud banks on both sides of the river can protect us from the enemies' arrows."

He then smiled, "Without any lights, what can they hit by shooting blindly into the darkness?"

With their horses, everyone walked down the river slowly. The river water is about waist deep.

In this kind of rigorous conditions, it has shown that their years of strict training have not gone to waste.

To prevent others from learning about the Wu Family Elite Army, eighty percent of their training is conducted during the night. Walking through the water in the dark is nothing to them.



It is even more challenging to have their horses following them obediently without a single sound.

Leading the way is Wu Shu and Jing Shan. They are holding onto a shield each in case of an attack and Jing Shan is the best wilderness navigator. He is the best person to spy on the situation ahead of them.

Another two Guardians are in charge of ferrying the wounded Wu Da while another Guardian is leading the horses. Everyone else including Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi are holding their crossbows in their arms. In case of any confrontation, they will fire their arrows mercilessly.

After travelling for ten over miles without any interruption, everyone knows that the most crucial moment has come and raised their alertness.

Coincidentally, the river has flowed to some uneven ground and the water level rises and falls accordingly. The sounds of gushing water are able to cover the sounds of their wading.

They were surrounded by dense forests in all four directions. Although stars can be seen beyond the canopy of the trees, the river area is still pitch black. The air is filled with the stench of mud and rotting leaves.

With his animal-like instincts, Jing Shan continued to lead everyone forward.

After walking for another ten odd steps, the river bed sinks even lower and the mud banks are even higher as a result.

The trees here are even thicker than before and the stars are hidden from sight. Like a bunch of blind men, everyone is moving forward based on their intuition and sense of touch.

Right at this moment, strong coughing sounds can be heard on the left bank.

Everyone was shocked and immediately stopped moving and increased their guard.

Although they have anticipated that they will encounter some enemies, they did not expect it to be so sudden and without any warning at all.

They are stuck below in the river. If the enemies fire their arrows down at them, no one will be able to stay alive.

All it takes is for one of the horses to whinny and everyone will be dead.

Luckily, they cannot see the enemy and the enemy cannot see them too.

From the right bank, a voice scolded, "Are you trying to scare me to death? All the spirits and ghosts would have been frightened off by your coughing."

On the left bank, someone softly laughed, "All of you are intimidated by Xiang Shaolong and are so easily agitated. After we have shot his men, I am sure that he will not dare to wander around recklessly. Moreover, we have laid horse-tripping ropes in all the strategic locations, including the river."

Still standing motionlessly in the river, everyone was feeling extremely nervous but was relieved at the same time.

While the enemies were talking and distracted, Jing Shan used a dagger and felt his way under the water. He cut three horse-tripping ropes in succession and cleared the obstacles away.

Just as they were about to continue moving, footsteps can be heard from the forests on the left side.

In a short while, an enemy messenger arrived and announced, "Orders from Master Bai. Tomorrow morning, we will attack them according to plan. Whoever killed Xiang Shaolong will be rewarded with five hundred taels of gold and whoever can catch Talented Lady Ji alive will be rewarded with one thousand taels of gold. Everybody clear?"

In the river, everyone was stunned. Ji Yanran's body is actually worth twice as much as Xiang Shaolong's life.

It is meaningless to debate with the enemy over the reward amount. With Jing Shan leading the way, they left the enemies further and further behind.

At daybreak, they were only two miles away from the danger zone.

They climbed up a little hill and observed the enemy from afar.

Wu Da's condition has stabilized and everyone's spirits rose.

The Guardians stood guard in all four corners while Jing Shan climbed up a tree and analyzed the surroundings.

Below the hill is a vast expanse of grasslands and there are trees all over. Once in a while, the river can be seen flowing among the grasslands and flocks of birds are flying across the orange sky, forming a colourful and vibrant panorama.

Xiang Shaolong and his two pretty wives were leaning against a large rock, sighing that the scenery is indeed beautiful but they are not in the mood to enjoy it.

Ji Yanran whispered to Xiang Shaolong, "Last night, the enemies mentioned that their leader is surnamed Bai. Among Du Bi's family warriors, there is a man named Bai Fei. He is well-known in Qin for his tracking and ambushing skills. Originally, he was a horse thief in the northlands but offended the King of the Xiong Nu so he escaped south and started working for Du Bi. If this is the man who is ambushing us, then we are in deep trouble."

Xiang Shaolong was amazed, "Why is Yanran so familiar with Du Bi's men?"

Ji Yanran kissed him lightly and gently replied, "I am concerned for you! I am helping you to do these things that you are too busy to do. Don't simply dismiss Sister Qin as a simple woman. She is actually very well-informed about everything happening inside and outside Qin. This information about Du Bi is from her sources."

Xiang Shaolong glanced at their campsite last night and decided, "If this is the case, we now have a chance to

ambush Bai Fei. He will be the man that is leading the group chasing towards us sooner or later. We must present him with a shower of arrows and this will take care of all our worries.”

As the morning sun is showing more and more of itself from the east, sounds of human talking and horses neighing can be heard from afar. A group of roughly five hundred men are riding through the dense woods towards them.

The men are split into five groups and the leading group is the smallest one with about fifty men and their speed is incredibly fast.

What is even more startling is that they only spent a short amount of time and managed to determine that they have travelled down the river and are now chasing in their direction.

But this is something they anticipated as Bai Fei is an expert horse thief.

Ji Yanran is using a special bow that needs to be supported with her leg. The shooting range is one thousand feet but as they are shooting down from a higher ground, the range is even further.

Since Bai Fei will lead the chase and be the first rider, they will know who exactly to shoot.

As their enemies approached them, everyone's heart is thumping wildly and they are having difficulty breathing.

If they cannot kill Bai Fei who is the tracking expert, coupled with their superior numbers and highly-skilled fighters, it will be extremely precarious situation for them. Additionally, they have the burden of Wu Da who is injured.

Over the two mile chase, Bai Fei only stopped three times briefly before they entered their firing range. Because of the thick vegetation, they did not have the chance to get a clear firing target.

Bai Fei is indeed an extraordinary man. He weaved in and out of the forests, making it hard for anyone to shoot him.

Bai Fei the professional horse thief cum assassin must have some true abilities to be able to survive until today.

Right now, Bai Fei happened to stop in a forest clearing. Without hesitation, Ji Yanran fired her arrow. The moment the bow sounded, Bai Fei evaded to one side and the arrow brushed past the horse and hit the grass below.

The shooting mechanisms rang out continuously.

Wu Yanzhu and his fellow Guardians sent their arrows flying non-stop at Bai Fei. Bai Fei's horse may have been struck down but the man himself has disappeared among the trees.

Bai Fei must have a keen sense of sight, smell and hearing.

The enemies are thrown into disarray. They quickly dismounted from their horses and hid among the trees and bushes.

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed.

He will now have to play a challenging cat-and-mouse game with them in this wilderness.

If he let his guard down, this will be his final resting place.

## CHAPTER 6

## Borrowing A Raft

[Translated by JUSTIN13]

THE WARHORSE let out a long grunt and its front legs kneeled down before it collapsed on the ground, throwing Zhao Zhi onto a grass patch. Xiang Shaolong and everyone hurriedly dismounted and helped an exhausted Zhao Zhi up. Xiang Shaolong ordered his men to release Wu Da who is tied to another horse and could not help but feel a huge sense of loss. For three days and three nights, they had been riding non-stop but were still unable to shake off their



pursuers. Now, the worst-case scenario had happened, Their horses were beginning to break down.

Far ahead of them were the Qin Ridges which were made up of several ridges intertwining between one and another. The more he looked at them, the lower his spirits sank. But he knew if they managed to reach there, their chances of survival would increase tremendously, unlike the flatlands where there was no place to hide. Regrettably, even with fresh horses, they would need at least three days and three nights of endless riding. Assessing the long distance between themselves and the Qin Ridges, everyone could not help but feel dejected.

Jing Shan who was spying behind them came back and reported, "The first enemy soldier has been sighted about five miles behind us and their riding speed is decreasing. This is so infuriating. We have already laid some traps to distract or mislead them but Bai Fei has seen through all of them."

Xiang Shaolong was feeling lost, so he went over to accompany Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi who were applying new medication to Wu Da's wounds. Ji Yanran pulled Xiang Shaolong to one side and advised, "Wu Da's body is burning hot and he is delirious. If we continue to ride non-stop like this, I am afraid he will not be able to make it to the Qin Ridges alive."

With all these problems plaguing him, Xiang Shaolong glanced over to the Qin Ridges again. The magnificent ridges numbering by the hundreds are carved by the wonders of

Mother Nature. If they can reach there safely, they can engage the enemy in a series of hit and run attacks as they made their way to meet up with Teng Yi. But in order to hide from their pursuers, they had strayed from their original route. Nobody was actually sure where they were exactly.

Ji Yanran noticed him staring at the Qin Ridges and understood his intentions. She pointed to a unique snow-capped peak and explained, "If I am not wrong, that should be the first peak of the Qin Ridges known as Mount Taibai. As a result, we have gone off course for almost a hundred miles. No wonder we did not see any signs of Second Brother!"

Even under such depressing circumstances, this top beauty can still maintain her cheerful demeanour and excellent disposition. Listening to her assuring words and pleasant voice, Xiang Shaolong calmed down and gathered his fighting spirit. Instructing everyone to take a rest, he pulled Ji Yanran up a small hill and scanned their surroundings.

As the sun slowly set behind the Qin Ridges, thousands of its rays shone across the plains. In the northeast, the enemies were also exhausted and had stopped chasing. Once in a while, sounds of horses neighing could be heard from their direction.

On their left, a river was flowing from the northwest direction towards the east. Ji Yanran remarked, "I heard that there is a magical fountain on Mount Taibai. The water temperature is high enough to cook food and is known for

their healing properties. If we can get there, there will be hope for Wu Da.”

Xiang Shaolong affirmed, “That is called a hot spring. The water is hot because of the lava beneath a dormant volcano and it carries a large amount of minerals which gives it healing properties.”

Ji Yanran was stunned, “What is a dormant volcano and what are minerals?”

Xiang Shaolong knew that he had said too much. Hugging her shoulder, he pacified, “I will explain to you later. Our priority now is to escape to the Qin Ridges.”

Pointing to the river flowing towards the Qin Ridges, he asked, “If Yanran is Bai Fei and you saw such a river which makes travelling extremely convenient, what would you do?”

Ji Yanran’s eyes lit up and replied, “I would be afraid that you will build rafts and sail down the river.”

Xiang Shaolong asked again, “What will you do about it?”

Ji Yanran exclaimed, “I will attack on both fronts. I will send some men to continue chasing on foot and build rafts at the same time. On the rafts, I will give chase down river. If we can sail ahead of you, we can then attack you from the front and the back simultaneously. It will be a hopeless situation for you.”

From afar, a group of birds flew up into the air in fear and circled the air for a while. Xiang Shaolong smiled, “Based on

Yanran's suggestion to use rafts to escape, we will win a decisive battle tonight."

Ji Yanran was astounded, "Do you really want to build rafts to escape? There are not many trees here and we probably need the whole night to build enough rafts to ferry so many men and horses. By then, the enemies would have attacked us."

Xiang Shaolong's hand snaked down to her tender waist and pinched her playfully. He romantically smiled, "I thought we are telepathically connected? Why can't Talented Lady Ji guess what I am thinking about?"

Ji Yanran let out a whine and leapt into his arms. Using all her strength to hug him, she charmingly smiled, "Telepathically connected, this is the most romantic sentence I have ever heard."

However, she did understand that after her beloved husband has spent the last three days running away from their pursuers like a wild animal, he had at least regained his confidence. The attacks have come about too suddenly and he was temporary lost due to his lack of preparation.

But in this life and death situation, Xiang Shaolong finally summoned his fighting spirit. The moon tonight is slighter bigger than the moon three days ago. However, it is still quite dark as there are many clouds blocking the moon in the sky.

The forest is filled with a strong killing aura. Xiang Shaolong and his men are prone on the opposite shore some distance

away. All their crossbows are loaded as they waited for the enemy to arrive. The warhorses have been led to another area so as to give them as much rest as possible. When the moon is high above them, frightened birds take to the skies, showing that the enemies are slowly approaching their positions.

By now, their horses are exhausted too and cannot move any more. The enemies are attacking them on foot. Some sounds can be heard from the river and true enough, ten over rafts flowed down the river. Bai Fei is really attacking them on both fronts. Because of the river separating them from the ground invaders, Xiang Shaolong is not worried about them. Moreover, he faked some woodcutting activity half a mile away from the opposite river bank, misleading the enemy that they are building rafts. The ignorant ground invaders will focus their assault in that direction and by the time they realise that it is a trick, Xiang Shaolong and the others would already have enough time to deal with the enemies on the rafts.

If they had tried to compete with the enemies on raft-building, they will be seriously disadvantaged because of their lesser numbers. It is proven after witnessing the enemies' ability to construct ten over rafts within several hours. Although the enemies numbered more than five hundred, they need everyone to participate in the raft building to achieve such efficiency. The moment the rafts were built, they set off immediately without any rest. In addition, they have just finished riding for three days and

three nights, and must be terribly exhausted. Compared to Xiang Shaolong and his men who have had several hours of rest, they are at a disadvantage.

Xiang Shaolong need not say anything as everyone automatically pointed their crossbows at the enemy rafts. From their higher ground, the arrow attack will be much more effective against the invaders below them. There may only be twenty of them but they are situated nearly a hundred feet above the shore. With large rocks and trees protecting them, they are in a state of invincibility.

Human silhouettes can be seen on the rafts. All the attackers are prone down with the men surrounding the rafts holding up protective shields and the men in the centre of the rafts holding onto bows that were already mounted with arrows. Xiang Shaolong and his men kept quiet and allowed the rafts to sail nearer to them. Five feet, four feet, three feet...

When the first raft has entered a close firing range, two men on both sides took out a long pole and prevented the raft from colliding with the huge rocks along the shore. This stretch of the river is filled with giant rocks and the current is quite strong. That is also the reason Xiang Shaolong chose this part of the river to lay his ambush. In the dense forests on the opposite shore, loud battle cries can be heard and fire torches were being lit, illuminating the forest.

Xiang Shaolong knew that it is time to attack. He pulled the trigger and his arrow sliced through the air. On the first raft, the enemy soldier who is holding onto the long pole gave a

tragic cry and fell into the river with the arrow embedded through his body, signaling the beginning of the river battle.

The enemies did not panic but hurriedly raised their shields above their heads and shot their arrows blindly towards both sides of the river. This was exactly what Xiang Shaolong wanted them to do. He did not fire his crossbow anymore but sat back and watched the show.

OH!

Awful sounds filled the air as everyone on the first raft is thrown into the air and eventually landed in the river. Xiang Shaolong had tied a few thick vines across the river. As the raft is travelling at quite a fast speed, everyone was swept off the raft when they collided into the vines.

The second round of arrows was finally fired. The men on the second raft met with the same fate and were all knocked down into the river, losing their grip over their shields and weapons at the same time. Arrows rained into the river and the river is filled with fresh and blood and tragic cries. The two rafts continue to flow down the river.

The men on the third raft saw that something was amiss and hurriedly rowed to shore. However, the fourth raft behind them could not stop in time and crashed into the third raft, sending more men falling into the river. Those men still on the rafts are stumbling all over one another.

More arrows rained down. The men are simply too tired to defend themselves and were felled by the arrows. The river is not very wide and the two rafts are blocking the majority

of the sailing route. Behind them, more than ten rafts crashed into one another in a chain collision. The enemies are in a state of panic and the air is filled with cries of death and pain. Those who are still alive tried their best to run away on shore or swim away in the river.

Another two empty rafts flowed down the river. Xiang Shaolong knew that it is time. He signalled his men and led them away from their ambush area. After running as fast as they can for half a mile, they met up with Wu Guang and Wu De who are waiting for them at the downstream. Wu De happily reported, "We managed to hook four rafts which are sufficient for our own escape."

Everyone boarded the rafts with their horses and sailed down the river gallantly. Zhao Zhi kissed Xiang Shaolong joyously. Ji Yanran sighed, "This trick of borrowing the rafts from the enemy is truly brilliant and credit goes to Hubby. This time, unless Bai Fei can really fly (Fei=fly), there is no way he can catch up to us."

Xiang Shaolong looked up at the star-studded sky and smiled, "Don't forget that they still have another ten odd rafts. Assuming that each raft can hold fifteen men, over a hundred men can still continue to pursue us. Luckily, each one of us is capable of fighting ten men. Let's imagine that they are all expert fighters and each one of us is capable of fighting five of them. Moreover, they are all very tired by now. We shall teach them another lesson at the Qin Ridges. After that, we can all have a good rest and enjoy the scenery of the Qin Ridges. Isn't life wonderful?"



Beside him, all the Guardians were taken aback as they did not expect Xiang Shaolong to continue his revenge plan after just scoring a huge victory. Clenching their fists, they realised that he is right. For the past few days, the enemies have been causing them more troubles than they could have imagined.

In a new twist of thinking, everyone is now hoping for the enemies to give chase. The forests are very dense along the way to the Qin Ridges. A three day's journey is completed in one night.

Early in the morning, they abandoned their rafts and climbed onto shore. After walking some distance away, they settled Wu Da and the horses down in a location and left Zhao Zhi and Wu Guang behind to watch over them. The rest of the men returned to the shore and loaded their crossbows in anticipation of the arrival of the enemies. Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran are comfortably sitting down together behind a pile of rocks. With their shoulders touching, they could not help but feel a strong sense of love.

Xiang Shaolong saw that Ji Yanran's eyes were shining brightly and asked, "What is my pretty wife thinking about?"

Ji Yanran nestled her head on his shoulder and wistfully replied, "I was thinking what if I had insisted on staying single and reclusive? I would still be stuck in Daliang leading a boring life and pining for you every day. That would have been a tragedy."

Xiang Shaolong was moved, "I would also suffer for my whole life without you as you are such an important part of me."

Ji Yanran mused, "I don't think so. Men are only concerned about their careers and are fickle minded by nature. You need not pacify me."

Xiang Shaolong mocked, "It doesn't help if you continue to think this way. Moreover, every word that I said are my honest feelings. Don't forget that the reward for you was twice for that of mine."

Ji Yanran angrily replied, "Du Bi is such a despicable cad. Not only did he want to kill you, he also wanted to insult your wife's modesty. In the future I will settle this score with him."

At this time, a secret bird whistle signal was sounded. The enemy has finally come. It may be due to the fact that several rafts had been damaged in the encounter last night that there were only seven rafts that came into view. There were twenty men on each raft, and the heavy load caused the rafts to be heavily submerged in the water. As a result, the rafts were sailing at a slow speed. The rafts had just made a turn when they crashed straight into the three rafts that Xiang Shaolong had purposely left behind to block their way. It was a chaotic scene as all the seven rafts piled into one another. Three of the rafts sank immediately and it was a pitiful scene for the enemy. Amidst all the confusion, the enemies jumped into the water and tried to swim towards

the shore. Xiang Shaolong issued a single command and from all four directions the guardians who were hiding in ambush began firing their arrows. As Xiang Shaolong had predicted, these invaders had not slept a wink for the past three days and had been working throughout the night. With their low morale compounded by this sudden attack, everyone was only interested in running for their lives and were not interested in defending themselves or putting up a fight. Fresh blood dyed the river red.

Those men on the shore could not avoid the incoming arrows, much less those in the water. In the blink of an eye over thirty men were shot dead while the rest tried to escape by swimming upriver. In all the confusion, no one could tell which of the enemies was Bai Fei. Xiang Shaolong unsheathed Bloodwave and leaped out towards the few lucky enemies who managed to climb up the river shore. It may be due to the fact that the enemy was in awe of Xiang Shaolong's famous name, the moment they saw him, they lost their will to fight and jumped straight back into the water, joining those who were trying to swim upriver. It was a very chaotic scene. The intense battle they expected did not happen at all. Xiang Shaolong restrained the guardians from pursuing the enemies and they left the area. The four days of murderous pursuit had finally come to a conclusion.

## CHAPTER 7

## Ferocious Wolves Of The Remote Mountains

[Translated by YEONGWEE]

HIGH in the Qinling mountain range, springs flow into mountain streams and the vegetation is lush. Yet most remarkable is the lake on top of the mountain that prompts one to imagine how countless years ago, as the glaciers receded, the waters collected in the glacial valley to create this miraculous phenomenon. Higher up, the climate turned cold and piercing winds came in waves. The pine trees appeared as if they were floating in a sea of clouds.

Since the party has strayed countless miles from their planned route, they are well and truly lost. Their energy and determination have nonetheless increased since inflicting heavy damage on the enemy. More so, their fear of further pursuit by the enemies' potential reinforcements prompted them to enter the mountains, holding on to the hope that once they've crossed the Qinling range, they would be at the Chu border. They can then decide what to do next at that point.

They climbed and meandered upwards till dusk before setting up camp in a misty valley. Everyone put on their leather coats against the cold, and started getting busy. Some of the guardians cut firewood and started a fire while the rest gathered fodder for the horses. Ji Yanran the two ladies focused on changing Wu Da's dressing. Wu Da awoke to find that he had escaped danger and was moved to tears. The mood of the camp improving greatly.

At this point, Jing Shan and Wu Shu came back with a mountain deer they had hunted, and excitedly reported that they had found a hot spring, adding to everyone's excitement. Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi, without an ounce of restraint, ordered Jing Shan and Wu Guang to pick Wu Da up, and towed Xiang Shaolong towards the largest of the hot springs. Once they exited the valley, an amazing vista appeared before their eyes. Countless peaks faced them while plants bisected the landscape. A stream of steaming hot spring-water flowed from the valley mouth.

They traced the stream upwards and within two hundred steps, they found a large warm pool that was more than five feet wide and than ten feet deep. Nestled in the mountains, it looked like the playground of immortals, fascinating and elegant. The spring flowed from a hole in the purplish-black granite, the sight of which caused everyone to relax.

"Ai yo!"

Zhao Zhi, who had been testing the water, suddenly pulled back her hand. She pouted, "Its so hot, how can we bathe in it?"

Wu Shu respectfully suggested, "Let your servant get a bucket. We can draw some water and wait for it to cool, after which you can use it."

Ji Yanran dejectedly said, "If we cannot immerse our whole bodies, it will not be as thrilling."

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Please do not fret, Talented Lady and Zhi Zhi. We have been going in the wrong direction. This spring will yet bear us fruit if we go downstream. As the water is exposed to the air for a longer period, the temperature will become more suitable."

The two ladies brightened immediately and led the party downstream in search of a better spot.

Five hundred steps downstream, past a few piles of closely spaced rocks, they found a large emerald-green pool that looked like the face of a precious mirror embedded in a stone platform. Surrounded by dense trees, waters deep and

clear, temperature lower than before, the two ladies cheered. They went to test the lake water and found that Xiang Shaolong was indeed right, the water was at a temperature suitable for humans. They were almost unable to resist jumping into the water immediately.

Wu Guang the two guardians set Wu Da down immediately. The two ladies took off his jacket and washed his wounds in the warm spring water. Xiang Shaolong noticed that his wounds were seventy to eighty percent healed and let out a sigh of relief, "As long as Little Da's fever recedes, he should be able to recover rapidly."

Wu Da moaned in comfort as his wounds were being washed by the hot water, "The two Madams, your servant feels like immersing himself into the water, is that ok?"

Ji Yanran, face turning red, stood up facing Jing Shan the two guardians and said, "Did you hear your brother's request? Quickly come and serve him!"

The two young men came immediately and undressed Wu Da. Xiang Shaolong and his wives then moved to the cliff at the far end of the pool. They leisurely sat down to enjoy the majestic mountain scenery.

The spring water flowed down into a thousand feet deep valley that was flanked by two steep cliffs topped by towering pine and cypress trees. The misty mountains against the glow of the setting sun made for an intoxicatingly beautiful scene. The two ladies speechlessly held on to Xiang

Shaolong's two arms. Looking at the scenery, Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is Yanran familiar with Chu's history?"

Ji Yanran flashed him an angry yet charming look, and refused to reply. Xiang Shaolong could not figure out what he had said wrong. Zhao Zhi came to the rescue, saying, "Hubby dares to question sister Yanran's learning? You deserve a beating!"

As Wu Da's moans of comfort floated over in the background, Xiang Shaolong turned his head and found that even Jing Shan and Wu Guang the two guardians had taken off their clothes and jumped into the pool, and were signaling to him their happiness. Speechless, he laughed, "My good wife the Talented Lady Ji, please forgive your hubby's deficient speech. Please, may I ask about Chu's glorious history as well as its present condition?"

Ji Yanran finally turned from anger to happiness, using her clear sweet voice, said, "Chu was indeed strong once, almost conquering all the fertile land in the South."

At this point her eyes revealed a look of sadness, perhaps recalling her lost home, since it was a strong Chu that finally annexed her country Yue. Xiang Shaolong bent down and kissed her face, showing his tenderness, said, "The hills are still green, the setting sun is still red, whats gone is gone. Yanran should not think too much."

Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi were both touched. Xiang Shaolong knew he had once again plagiarized the work of latter people and signed bitterly.



Ji Yanran said, "The hills are still green, the setting sun is still red. Such deep meaning that it causes one to lament. Who is able to express himself as deeply and as eloquently as hubby?"

Zhao Zhi is swept by the strong currents of emotion, and gushed, "Hubby sat facing the setting sun and spontaneously composed classic poetry. Zhi Zhi loves you to death!"

Xiang Shaolong was ashamed in his heart and diverted the conversation, "Yanran has yet to explain Chu's present situation."

Ji Yanran's beautiful eyes dreamily looked into the distant setting sun, speaking as if she was sleep-talking, said, "During the final years of King Huai of Chu, Qin used Shang Yang's political reforms to strengthen itself and, using the policy of conquest with the Horizontal Alliance (clique of the School of Diplomacy during the Warring States Period), was successful for a season. Chu's Vertical Alliance to resist Qin proved a failure. Dan Yang and Lan Tian counties were both defeated by Qin. The greatest set-back was the ceding of six hundred miles of land near the two cities Han Zhong and Shang Yu. Wei also took the opportunity to attack Chu's neighboring country Zheng. It was not until Chu transformed their national policies that they began to have some victories amidst the losses. Is hubby interested in the details?"

Ji Yanran's exposition was clear and concise. Even though Xiang Shaolong did not know where Dan Yang, Lan Tian, Han Zhong and Shang Yu were, he could make a guess. Nodding

his head, Shaolong said, "Since those three kids are not going to leave the pool so quickly, we should chat a bit more."

Zhao Zhi did not know that Wu Guang and Jing Shan were both naked in the water, couldn't help but looked over and turned her head back immediately with a blush. Xiang Shaolong secretly mused that if it was Zhao Ya or Shan Rou, they would not have been so shy and might even have joked about it. As he thought about the two women, he could not help feeling aroused.

Ji Yanran continued, "Once King Huai of Chu was tricked into coming to Qin and died of deprivation, Chu became even more of a failure. When King Qing Xiang ascended the throne, he no longer had the strength to expand towards the Northeast. He expanded into the Southwest instead, sending the Great General Zhuang along the Yuan river into Yunnan, out of Qie Lan and overcoming Ye Lang, creating a series of vassal states that abided by Chu's rule. Leveraging Yunnan's resources, Chu continued to push towards the Southwest, occupying large tracts of land from Ba and Shu countries, dominating territory on both sides of the river."

Only now does Xiang Shaolong begin to understand why the people of Chu continuously advance and retreat again when defending against Qin in Zhu - simply because they were too occupied to worry about the North.

Zhao Zhi asked curiously, "This should be a good thing for the people of Chu, why does sister Yanran think that this is both a boon and a bane?"

Ji Yanran replied, "Its definitely a good thing for a country to increase its territory, but this requires a large powerful military to establish and maintain. The people of Chu have been compelled by the people of Qin to shift their capital three times. After losing Wu and Qian counties to Qin, the lords of the prominent families in Chu took the opportunity to advance themselves as king. Yunnan, Ye Lang, Min Shan and Qie Lan provinces awaited the outcome and disregarded the capital. Although King Qing Xiang once counter-attacked Qin, wrestling back fifteen villages by the river as if it was a county, Chu remained under the constant battery of Qin. That is why today King Xiao Lie has to hand over the Na province to Qin in order to sue for peace. Because of this, they had to cede half their territory and to move their capital Southeast to Ju Yang. After that, though they managed to exterminate the country of Lu, they continued to lose every time they were matched against Qin's troops. With Qin's influence continuously increasing, Chu had to move the capital Southeast yet again, this time towards Shou Chun, the territory West of Qing Yang falling into the palm of great Qin. Now they can only wait at death's door like a dog panting its last breath. That is why whenever Li Yuan talks to me about his plans to revive Chu, I can't even accept half a sentence he says."

Zhao Zhi said, "Li Yuan is so muddle-headed that he didn't realize that sister Yanran dislikes the Chu people most of all."

Ji Yanran replied, "You can't really say that either. Although there is some regret for the loss of my country, large countries have been swallowing smaller ones for the past few hundred years. No matter how the conquered countries argue against it, Chu is able to rise to the top because of its size, unifying more than half of the Southeastern territories. It has also had the most profound and long lasting influence on the civilizations in the central plains, especially after absorbing my country Yue, when its influence extended to the lower reaches of the Huai river, Si and the South China Sea."

She stopped for a while, then continued, "There isn't a country in the central plains whose culture is more colorful and beautiful than Chu's, the main reason being that after annexing a few tens of countries and tribes, all the different cultures have been mixed together through inter-marriage. However, this presents a problem politically. Even though Chu has the largest territory and influence amongst the nations, King Xiao Lie is oftentimes unable to do as he pleases. Chu may seem to have revived and demonstrated resistance to Qin, but this belies unspeakable difficulties."

This really shows that an evening of conversation with his beloved is better than ten years of study. Xiang Shaolong's understanding has now extended to the whole of the presently nonexistent China. Thinking that the future Qin Shihuang whom Xiao Pan becomes will unify so many

different countries, cultures, ethnic groups and talents under his banner, moving the distant heavens and broad earth, and thinking that he himself created this Qin Shihuang, Xiang Shaolong began to have an on-top-of-the-world feeling.

Amidst the sound of whistling, the three guardians including Wu Da had stopped bathing and were lighting a fire for them to replace the light from the fading twilight. The two ladies jumped up happily. Wu Da looked like someone born again, with a radiant glowing face, able to leave with just a supporting arm. This caused Xiang Shaolong to click his tongue in surprise. The hot spring now belonged to Xiang Shaolong and his wives. Looking at the two ladies remove their coats and open their belts, Xiang Shaolong became aroused, following them into the steamy water.

Climbing high and going low, uphill and downhill.

After walking in the Qinling Range for five days, everyone finally realized that they were lost. Even though the Qinling Range presented a majestic and mysterious mountain scene, they had lost the desire to enjoy themselves. This was especially so with wild wolves howling near and far, as if they were continuously spying on the party, causing them to sleep uneasily. The only good news was Wu Da's gradual recovery such that he was able to move on his own, greatly reducing everyone's physical and psychological burden.

Xiang Shaolong has a lot of experience in route marching and is able to navigate using the sun, moon and stars. Heading Southeast, he calmed down a little, knowing that the day

they crossed the Qinling Mountains, they would be somewhere on the Chu border. Over the next two days, after losing another two warhorses to the ravines, the terrain began to slope downwards with the climate getting warmer. They can no longer see the soul freezing ancient glacier. The treetops were now also free of snow, improving everyone's mood.

That night, they set up camp on a tableland beside a mountain. After dinner, everyone except the assigned sentries hid in their tents. With no incidents on the mountain, Xiang Shaolong relaxed and took to the two ladies like fish to water, feeling not the least bit lonesome. While Ji Yanyan is romantic and passionate when alone with Xiang Shaolong, she is very aloof in front of his other wives and maids, much less when living in the same room. Nonetheless, under the exceptional circumstances, and also because she had grown closer to Zhao Zhi, she released herself to enjoy the proximity of being wrapped in a tent, treating Xiang Shaolong to amorous pleasures.

While they were about to sleep in each other's arms, Zhao Zhi remarked, "Why is the wolf pack howling especially ferociously tonight?"

Xiang Shaolong turned his ear and listened carefully, realizing that the wolves' howling was concentrated below the slope to the South. While this raised his curiosity, leaving the warm sleeping pad and the touch of his beautiful wives and the tent was too much to ask. Laughing, he replied, "Maybe its because they know that the two smoothest, most

tender-fleshed and tasty women hidden here are about to leave them, so they decided to organize a sending-off party!" The two ladies took the opportunity to be petulant and bunched up with him, putting up all kinds of x-rated scenes.

While they were at their busiest, a human shout was heard amidst the wolves' howls, causing a burst of frantic movement. Xiang Shaolong jumped up and hurriedly rushed out while urging both ladies to remain in the tent. The two ladies wanted to follow, but regretted they were powerless and hence remained obediently. As Xiang Shaolong threw himself out of the tent, all the men had also emerged from their tents. Xiang Shaolong instructed all except five men to remain guarding the camp. Clutching a torch, together with his five most capable men, Jing Shan, Jing Qi, Wu Guang, Wu Yan and Wu Shu, he rushed towards the sound of the human voice.

After climbing over a mountain top, everyone readied their crossbows and went down the long slope together. The wretched bugle of the howling wolves became clearer, indicating that the wolf pack was about to attack their target. They had not reached the bottom of the three hundred feet long slope when ten over wolves caught their scent and rushed over. Rushing at full speed, it seemed as if more than ten sets of electric bulbs were coming at them. The ghastly sets of white teeth and flaming green eyes horrified them. Six crossbow bolts were released. Six of the wild wolves were hit and fell into the valley at the bottom of

the slope with a miserable hiss. The remaining ten odd wolves fearlessly rushed them. There wasn't enough time to reload the crossbows. Everyone drew their swords and dashed headlong into the wolf pack.

Fresh blood splashed and the wild wolves cried miserably. The wild wolves were extremely quick-witted. Thankfully all six men were highly talented, occupying strategic locations. They still found it hard to cope nonetheless. Xiang Shaolong had just cleaved one of the wild wolves when another wolf followed by jumping up, aiming to bite his throat. Xiang Shaolong let out roar and kicked out his right leg towards the pit of the vicious wolf's stomach. The alert wolf responded by lowering its head and biting his boot. Thankfully, his sword was able to circle to the wolf's eyes, prompting the wolf to hiss and retreat. However, there were two fresh tooth marks on his boot, showing the sharpness of the wolf's teeth.

Jing Shan and Jing Qi were both accustomed to hunting and understood the situation best. They were not only fearless, but rushed forward with a shout, slashing with their swords and kicking with their legs. They used their superior ground to press their advantage while brandishing their torches, forcing the newly arrived wolves back. With an exclamation, Wu Guang was pushed to the ground by a wolf that rushed him from the side. This youngster who has always believed himself to be strong unleashed his aggression and threw the entire wolf down the slope into a pile of rocks. His sleeves were nonetheless ripped open and fresh blood flowed down.



By the time Xiang Shaolong kicked away another wolf that was attacking Wu Guang, more than ten wolves had been killed, wounded or driven away. Taking a look around, he found that aside from Jing Shan, all the rest had been injured with bites or claw marks. He couldn't help but be shocked at the ferocity and heroism of the wolves.

As the howl of the wolves had decreased noticeably, they heard a faint whoop from the bottom of the slope. Everyone was surprised at running into another human being in such a deep and remote mountain range. Their curiosity and sympathy aroused, they disregarded the violent wolves, formed up their ranks, loaded their crossbows and rushed downhill. The terrain at the bottom of the slope was flat and level, surrounded by mountains. Close to a hundred hungry wolves had gathered at the Eastern end, endlessly rushing up the rocky slope.

At the top of the slope was a nearly extinguished fire. They could only hear the sound of voices in the shadow of the fire, but could not see any of the people. The hungry wolves, seeing a rush of people approaching, spread out in caution. Those that rushed over were all shot by the crossbows. This time the party had learned its lesson. Half the men kept the wolves at bay with the torches while the other half continuously loaded and fired their crossbows. The hungry wolves dropped one by one.

When Jing Shan and Jing Qi reached the short rocky slope, the wolf pack had already dispersed into the distance, not daring to approach again. Nonetheless, Jing Shan and the

rest's killing spirit had been aroused and they continued to pursue and shoot down the wolves, giving vent to their earlier resentment. Xiang Shaolong knew that the wolf pack was now afraid, and so let down his guard. Facing upwards, he shouted, "Who is the friend up there? Is anyone injured?"

One person appeared at the top of the slope, fist in palm, replying, "Many thanks to all the heroes' assistance and kindness. Three of us have been bitten by the wolves, but we are not in any danger. As long as we can gather dry wood to keep our fire burning, we can survive till dawn."

Xiang Shaolong perceived that his speech was formal and proper, yet appeared to be evasive and cautious, hence he did not request to be allowed to go up for a meeting. Thinking that this was nothing unusual, he loudly shouted, "Since this is the case, we will chase the wolves away. Elder brother may come down and fell some trees to keep the fire going."

He then paid his compliments and proceeded to pursue the wolf pack.

## CHAPTER 8

## Joining Company And Journeying Together

[Translated by YEONGWEE]

AS the morning broke the next day, the two ladies rose early and emerged from the tent.

Xiang Shaolong was exhausted from the hard work of killing and repelling wolves all night, so he slept until noon before crawling out of bed.

While he was still washing his face and combing his hair, a guest arrived.

This person had a dignified face and large ears, appearing formidable. He was dressed in a warrior's outfit, displaying outstanding skill that must have been the result of a lifetime's training. His left arm was bound up, evidence of the last night's battle with the wolves.

When he found out that Xiang Shaolong was the leader, the man hurried forward and said, "Your humble servant is Zhuang Kong, what is the hero's honourable name? I was criticized by my Madam for not asking after benefactor's name last night. I have come to apologize humbly this morning."

Xiang Shaolong saw that, as before, he still hadn't revealed his status and origins, but at least he now knew there were womenfolk in his company. He was astounded, and said, "Elder brother, since you do not wish to reveal your status and origins, why come up to ask after ours? Why don't we treat each other as strangers who met by chance, and go our separate ways?"

Zhuang Kong did not expect Xiang Shaolong to be so direct as to point out the deliberate concealment of his origins and felt embarrassed. He was nonetheless an extraordinary person also, and shamefully said, "Benefactor is right to rebuke me. Regretfully I am under strict orders from my Madam not to freely reveal her identity. However, since I have met benefactor, I am delighted. Would benefactor be willing to allow your humble servant to ask Madam for instructions? I will see benefactor again."

At this point Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi emerged from the forest hand in hand and returned to the camp. Zhuang Kong stared at them in a daze, obviously not believing that he would get to see such unmatched beauties in such a place.

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "This matter can be avoided. We have pressing matters at hand and need to leave immediately. Lets leave it at that! Here's wishing brother Zhuang and your Madam a smooth journey."

Zhuang Kong was shocked, withdrew his gaze and earnestly asked, "Is benefactor going through the Chu border?"

Ji Yanran the two ladies saw Shaolong talking to him and could guess what was happening. They stood to one side and listened attentively.

Xiang Shaolong stared blankly, "Isn't this the route to Han Zhong county? It should still be Qin's territory."

Zhuang Kong was startled and pointed out, "I'm afraid benefactor has lost his way. These are the spines of the Qinling mountain range. To reach Han Zhong and Nan Yang counties, you need to skirt Chu's border for five days even if you have the correct directions. Your humble servant has traversed the route twice and am definitely not mistaken."

Xiang Shaolong couldn't help cursing Du Bi in his heart. He would have caught up to Teng Yi ten days ago if he had not been compelled by Du Bi's men to abandon his route. He has instead ended up in this accursed place. Thinking about the hard journey behind, he did not have the courage to turn

back. He had better continue towards the Chu border before thinking about how to meet up with Teng Yi.

He signed, "Are you guys going towards Chu too?"

Zhuang Kong replied, "Indeed so. If hero does not mind, let us join company and journey together. It is good to have people to talk to along the way."

Xiang Shaolong guessed that the other party must have been frightened by the pack of wolves the night before. After muttering to himself for a while, he asked, "How big is your party?"

Zhuang Kong replied, "Aside from the Madam, there are five women and one child, and including your humble servant, fifteen servants."

Xiang Shaolong thought about all the wrong turns and wasted miles he would have had to walk if he did not have Zhuang Kong as a guide. He also figured that if they parted ways immediately after leaving the Qinling mountains, his party would not be overly burdened. He finally nodded his head in agreement.

Zhuang Kong was so happy that he forgot all about asking for Xiang Shaolong's identity and origins. They arranged to meet at the bottom of the slope in a short while. Zhuang Kong then hurried away.

Ji Yanran smiled and drew near, saying, "From this guy's style of clothing and accent, we can be sure that he is a Chu nobleman. Hubby had better be careful."

Xiang Shaolong said, "For the time being, I shall be known as Xiang Ran. You will be my first wife and Zhi Zhi will be the second. This trip to Chu is for business. Even if they do not believe us, it will be difficult for them to discern the truth."

By the time Xiang Shaolong's party had de-camped and led the horses down the hill, Zhuang Kong's group of fifteen men, five women and one child had already assembled and were waiting respectfully. There were a few wounded amongst the fifteen servants, two of whom had wolf claw marks on their necks and faces, causing trepidation to onlookers.

On inspection, besides Zhuang Kong, there were at most two others who could barely be classified as experts.

Most of the women were wearing cloaks and had their faces covered with muslin veils. Even though one could see a vague outline of their faces, it was indistinct.

The two women who did not cover their faces were as thick and solid as bulls, and while they could not be regarded as ugly, were exceedingly plain.

The other three women all had graceful postures, and one could tell that they were noblewomen from a single glance. Under the semi-transparent muslin, they exuded a sort of hazy and mysterious yet beautiful charm.

One of the women was especially tall. She also appeared to be the eldest, aging just above thirty. From appearances, she had to be Zhuang Kong's Madam.

The child, on the other hand, had pretty delicate features and a pair of spirited eyes. He looked like he was between eleven and twelve years old. On meeting Xiang Shaolong and his party, he opened his curious eyes and sized them up.

The five women bowed on seeing them, their eyes falling on Ji Yanran. The Madam spoke first, saying, "Your servant's husband is named Zhuang. Your servant will not forget hero's assistance and benevolence last night even when old, but does not yet know the hero's honorable name. Please enlighten so that your servant can engrave it in the heart and mind."

Xiang Shaolong arrived in front of her and returned the courtesy. He laughed, saying, "My humble self is named Xiang Ran. These two are my wives. I'm on this trip to try my luck in Chu. Looking to see if I can obtain some high quality gold. Didn't think that we would lose our way. However if we did not lose our way, we would not have met Madam and your noble family. Is this little boy your esteemed son?"

Madam Zhuang scrutinized Xiang Shaolong from behind her veil, saying, "Indeed he is my son Zhuang Baoyi. The other two ladies are your servant's third and fourth younger sisters Youcui and Youning. The rest are my family servants."

The other two ladies shyly rose as one.

Madam Zhuang's gaze fell on Ji Yanran's face, seeming to think of something, but kept the thoughts hidden, merely saying, "Its hard to believe that the wild wolves around the mountain are so heroic and unafraid of people. We had



prepared defenses but almost had a calamitous brush with the wolves. It was fortunate that hero relieved the siege. Now that hero is traveling with us, we are very much relieved."

Xiang Shaolong noticed the time of the day, smiled and said, "We woke up late today. We should set off immediately!"

As Madam Zhuang nodded her head, Zhuang Kong hurriedly ordered horses to be brought forward and helped Madam Zhuang, her sisters and her son to get mounted. Even though he was still young, this Zhuang Baoyi was as stable as Mount Taishan on horseback, without any fear.

Everyone then started to descend the mountain.

Zhuang Kong was indeed not bragging. He really knew the route well, saving Xiang Shaolong's party much time and effort. Nonetheless the three ladies and child required guides to lead their horses, hence they progressed slowly. This was unavoidable after all.

The two parties did not make conversation on the road. Only that Zhuang Kong kept pointing out the directions and the landmarks en-route, causing Xiang Shaolong to have the pleasurable feeling of being in a tour group.

When they en-camped at night, Madam Zhuang's party retreated to their tents to eat their dinner, presenting even less of a chance for conversation.

They proceeded like this for five days, until they set eyes on the Chu border.

That night, they en-camped to rest as usual. Xiang Shaolong and Ji Yanran his two wives together with the guardians surrounded the campfire roasting the hunted game and engaging in cheerful banter.

Zhuang Kong and his party stayed at the other end of the camp eating their dry rations, having declined Xiang Shaolong's courtesy invitation.

The full moon in the middle of the sky cast a golden hue on the surrounding mountainous landscape. The snowy peaks in the distance shimmered mysteriously.

In time they heard the howl of the wolves, and couldn't help but feel that the tranquil and placid mountain and fields were nonetheless surrounded by danger. To lighten her husband's burden, Zhao Zhi pointed out, "After we cross two more mountains, we will step into the plains. Isn't it exciting? I wished it was morning already."

Ji Yanran sidled up to Xiang Shaolong and softly said, "The other party is nervous."

Xiang Shaolong looked over to Zhuang Kong's party. Sure enough, while they remained silent, they were a little fidgety. He nodded his head in agreement, but couldn't think of anything else to say.

Since the other party already refused to divulge anything, it was useless to ask. Moreover, once they reached the Chu border, they would be too busy with their own business to worry about somebody else's.

At this point, a burst of howling appeared nearby. Wu Guang turned to Jing Shan and laughed, saying, "Your old friends are here again. Do not be merciful when you execute, if not they will use their teeth to be intimate with you."

Jing Qi's expression darkened, saying, "I think the wolf pack is here for revenge."

Jing Shan also frowned silently.

Wu Yan was puzzled, asking, "Do you really think that wolves are like humans, able to hold grudges?"

Jing Qi replied, "There is nothing fantastic about this. Horses have their nature, recognizing their masters. Wolves have their nature, knowing their enemies. Whats so strange about this?"

Zhao Zhi is the least courageous, and worriedly said, "In that case you guys should quickly think of a way to deal with them."

Xiang Shaolong is also alarmed because even though they have camped on a platform beside a cliff, the other three sides were slopes with dense trees. If a few tens or a few hundreds of the wolves were to break through, it would be no laughing matter. If only he had a heavy machine gun! Wu Shu, who was the wisest and most cool-headed of the guardians, smiled saying, "We do not dare to disobey second Madam's command. Could we nonetheless fill our stomachs to regain our energy before going to work?"

Zhao Zhi pouted and complained to Xiang Shaolong, "Wu Shu this little kid is trying to play punk with moi. Zhi Zhi never said that he could not eat."

Xiang Shaolong laughed out loud saying, "That sheep's leg is going to be burnt soon, quickly take it down and put it on the plate. As long as my two wives have something to eat, all will be forgiven."

Ji Yanran playfully said, "Is Zhi Zhi a glutton? You have maligned her so. I want to seek justice on her behalf."

They passed the time like that.

After dinner, Jing Shan and the rest went to deploy animal traps in good spirits, seeming only to fear that the wolves would not come, causing everyone to be happy and in good humor.

Ji Yanran the two ladies also joined in the fun. Ironically, it was Xiang Shaolong who managed to steal some free time. He sat in front of the fire staring blankly and lost in thought. Past events and the future, likes and dislikes all flitted through his mind.

At this moment, Madam Zhuang opened her tent, came out and sauntered towards Xiang Shaolong. She was dressed in a plain white jacket, a white cloak and a hat with an inlaid pearl. With her veil down, she looked like a beautiful spirit from the netherworld.

Xiang Shaolong was a little startled and continued gazing at her. Only when she arrived at his side, greeted him and sat

down did he open his mouth to ask, "Is Madam Zhuang unable to sleep?"

Since she was close enough for him to smell her breath and since she was under the glare of the fire, the veil was no longer effective. He saw that the silhouette of her face was elegant, graceful and beautiful. Though her beauty was not as soul shaking as Qin Qing's, she was a still rare beauty.

Her bright and intelligent eyes, reflecting the bright and flickering bonfire, gazed at Xiang Shaolong. She suddenly sighed faintly, "My heart is troubled so how can I fall asleep?"

After all this while, this is the first time that Xiang Shaolong has talked to her up close. It was a new sensation for him. He nodded and said, "Madam does not need to reveal her matters to my humble self."

Madam Zhuang noticed that he was looking at her face intently and softly asked, "Is hero able to see your servant's appearance?"

Xiang Shaolong was slightly embarrassed and said, "At this angle and under the light, I can more or less see a little."

In his heart, he felt that these words carried a hint of romance intent. Was she trying to seduce him to do something for her?

This Madam Zhuang reminded him of Lady Pingyuan and Empress Jing in that they were all mature and older beauties. They were no longer as pure as young maidens but

were instead extremely practical. They knew how to use themselves and their beauty to accomplish their objectives.

Madam Zhuang lowered her head and continued saying, "Is hero really on this trip to Chu to look for gold?"

Xiang Shaolong did not expect her to be so perceptive and direct. He did not dare hesitate, and replied, "Men die for wealth, birds die for food. If not for gold, why would I weary myself with the long and difficult journey?"

Madam Zhuang pondered these two wise sentences "men die for wealth, birds die for food" silently for a good while before raising her head again to say, "Hero Xiang's words are poetic and meaningful. Definitely an extraordinary man. Moreover, your two elegant and beautiful wives are second to none, and not one person in your household is not an expert. Should I believe that you are bustling all over for something as trivial as wealth?"

Xiang Shaolong refused to admit it, replied, "How can gold be a trivial matter? Madam must be joking."

From behind her veil, Madam Zhuang stared at him without blinking and said unhurriedly, "Since this is the case, as long as Hero Xiang escorts us to Yunnan, I will thank hero with one thousand teals of gold. Your servant is prepared to swear a fell oath, and will definitely keep her word."

Xiang Shaolong was shocked, recalling Ji Yanran's discourse about how Chu was thwarted in its Eastern invasion and was compelled to expand Southwestwards. The protagonist was

one Great General Zhuang, who shared the same family name as Madam Zhuang's husband.

Later when Chu's power waned, that Zhuang together with the vassal states attempted to take over the throne. Could it be that that Zhuang was the king of Yunnan?

After recovering from his shock, he said unenthusiastically, "Is Madam related to the king of Yunnan in some way?"

Madam Zhuang softly replied, "The former king is my father-in-law."

Xiang Shaolong figured that this was another fight for the throne, and another royal tragedy. He lost the mood to listen further. He gasped, "Madam's suggestion is indeed tempting, but this thousand teals of gold is too difficult to earn. Moreover, I am not willing to endanger my two lovely wives who are only on this trifor sightseeing. Please forgive me, for the heart is willing but the body is weak."

Madam Zhuang also signed, and gently said, "Xiang Shaolong has the backing of the Wu family, how can he be interested in a thousand teals of gold?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed bitterly, "So you already knew who I was, yet toyed with me deliberately."

Madam Zhuang giggled, "A person of your appearance and body shape cannot be found amongst ten thousand men. The Talented Lady Ji is even more difficult to pass off. You are both so famous all over, your servant finds it strange that Mister Xiang thought he could fool all of us."

Again she smiled and said, "If you were some common man, your servant might have used her body to buy your favour, but I know that this would not be effective on you. Why don't we openly strike a mutually profitable deal instead?"

Xiang Shaolong had an uneasy feeling. This Madam Zhuang did not only have Lady Pingyuan and Empress Jing's qualities, she also had Zhao Ya's smartness that was not afraid of opposition, causing him to be provoked.

He took a deep breath, collected his mind, and said, "Honestly, I do not know what you can use to trade with me."

Madam Zhuang had a card up her sleeves, said, "This trip to Chu, is Mister Xiang after Li Yuan or Tian Dan? If its the latter, I do not fear that you will refuse to deal with me."

Xiang Shaolong was momentarily stunned and tongue-tied. He knew that although many people knew about his plan to attack Tian Dan, it was limited to a small circle of people in the royal family and the military in Xianyang. How did this Madam Zhuang know this secret?

Madam Zhuang softly said, "If Mister Xiang knew that Lady Huayang is my aunt, he would not be so surprised."

Xiang Shaolong took a deep breath and said, "Did Madam come from Xianyang?"

Madam Zhuang refused to answer, and said, "Could Mister please tell me whether this trip is due to Tian Dan. If the answer is not, then your servant does not have the



necessary means to do business with Mister. It would then be best to drop this matter."

Xiang Shaolong tried to discern with his heart. Her tone seemed to suggest that she knew something about Tian Dan. He could not help being startled, gasping, "Madam is formidable. Please continue your discourse."

Madam Zhuang happily said, "Your servant trusts that Mister is an upright nobleman. Once he knows your servant's secret, even if he does not accept the deal, he would not reveal the secret. Is this the case?"

Xiang Shaolong bitterly laughed, "Don't tell me that I, Xiang Shaolong, will harm you women and children?"

Madam Zhuang's spirit was roused, "The reason I know so many secrets is all because I have an agent amongst Li Yuan's confidantes. Mister should understand now!"

Xiang Shalong suddenly realized that Madam Zhuang was herself from Chu, was also Zhuang's daughter-in-law and what's more was Lady Huayang's close relative. For one of the spies from her intelligence system to infiltrate Li Yuan's confidantes was not unreasonable. No wonder she knew that he wanted to deal with Tian Dan.

Madam Zhuang smiled, "Could Mister Xiang lift your servant's veil? Your servant wants to tell you an unfathomable secret face to face."

Xiang Shaolong frowned and said, "Madam belongs to another man, I am afraid that it would be improper for me to do so."

Madam Zhuang sadly said, "My late husband has already been beheaded by the rebel army in the chaos five years ago. Your servant does not belong to anyone presently. Why else would I flee my home village and go to Qin? If not for Lady Huayang's protection, your servant would have been captured by the Chu people long ago."

Xiang Shaolong heaved a sigh and lifted her veil. A face that was half happy and half angry, and filled with the charm of a mature beauty appeared before him.

Her jade-like face was a little too long, but matched perfectly with her slender and graceful swan-like neck, producing a uniquely attractive charm.

In addition she had a cute little mole on her lower jaw that balanced the whole package to perfection.

Her eyes were indeed bright and intelligent, causing men's hearts to race.

Even though she did not have Qin Qing's classical beauty, she had the audacity and wild nature that Qin Qing lacked, causing men to want to bed her impulsively.

No wonder she needed to veil her face.

Madam Zhuang saw him sizing her up unabashedly and was pleased, drawing back her shyness, said, "Mister thinks that your servant's appearance is pleasing!"

Xiang Shaolong mentally put on his guard. While she insisted from the beginning that she had no intention of seducing him, she was actually doing so. Yet it was difficult to fault her. For a frail woman like her to return to her home country to help her son ascend the throne, besides relying on the gifts that heaven has bestowed on her, what else could she rely on?

One could image from the time she left her country till today how many times she had used her beautiful body to barter for help from men.

He couldn't help but sigh again, "Madam does not need to lower herself. You have not yet revealed the big secret!"

A look of amazement flitted across Madam Zhuang's eyes. She softly said, "Only till now do I understand why even the Widow Qing finds it difficult to restrain herself with Mister. A person's words reveals his inner cultivation. From Mister's restrained words, I can tell that Mister is extraordinary."

Xiang Shaolong silently admitted his shame, forced a bitter laugh and said, "Returning to one's country is a serious matter, Madam had better not fall for me. You might cause trouble to yourself."

Madam Zhuang covered her mouth in an enchanting smile, saying, "You have confidence in yourself. Why should you be afraid of other people's admiration? Even to the point of warning us off, ai! Nobody will believe that in this world there really exists a man like you who is afraid of women's affections."

The more Xiang Shaolong interacts with this Madam Zhuang, the more he is enticed by her. At this moment, he realized that Zhuang Kong and his party had gone to the slopes to help out, leaving the two of them single man and woman alone at the space outside the tents. Secretly alarmed, he turned serious and said, "Your servant is listening intently."

Madam Zhuang restrained her smile and softly said, "Tian Dan has already returned to the Chu capital Shou Chun."

Xiang Shaolong shook uncontrollably, "What?"

Madam Zhuang leisurely explained, "As Tian Dan has enemies everywhere both inside and outside of Chu, he has an identical stand-in that follows him everywhere. Once he realized that you were not willing to let him go, he hid himself amongst Li Yuan's troops and departed. The person you saw thereafter was his stand-in!"

Xiang Shaolong was covered in cold sweat. No wonder Tian Dan kept such a low profile during the hunt and tried his best to avoid attending the public events. To think this was the reason.

He knew he was short by one move in this game of chess and could not defeat the old fox.

He needed to notify Teng Yi and Xu Yiluan immediately to prevent them from being wiped out by a Chu counter-attack.

Once he thought about this, he lost the mood for anything else. He has now failed completely and needs to write his name backwards.

Suddenly Madam Zhuang's face seemed to get bigger. While he was still in a daze, Madam Zhuang approached and kissed him lightly on the lips before sitting back, saying, "As long as you help me return to my country, I will help you kill Tian Dan."

Xiang Shaolong woodenly said, "You are powerless to defend yourself, how can you help me?"

Madam Zhuang solemnly said, "This villain Li Ling is able to murder his master and betray his country only because of King Xiao Lie's support in the background. Now that King Xiao Lie is dead, there are many people in Shou Chun and Yunnan who support us. Circumstances have changed entirely. If not how would I dare to return to Chu?"

Xiang Shaolong recovered from his shock and said, "Did you also obtain the news of King Xiao Lie's death from Li Yuan?"

Madam Zhuang replied, "Of course not. Our family's roots in Chu are deep. Zhuang Kong came to us from the faraway Chu precisely to inform us and to bring us back."

Xiang Shaolong almost lost his voice, said, "What? King Xiao Lie is really dead?"

Madam Zhuang looked at him uncomprehendingly.

Xiang Shaolong could not stop shuddering. It was hard to believe that his scheme had accidentally helped Li Yuan rush back in time to seize power. Otherwise Li Yuan would still be in Xianyang.

This matter was so strange as to exceed everyone's expectations.

After taking a deep breath, he said with resolve, "If I can kill Tian Dan, I will use all my strength to help your son take hold of the throne."

## CHAPTER 9

## Setting Sail On The River Huai

[Translated by YEONGWEE]

ALL their original plans have turned out to be based on wishful thinking and have been messed up.

The wolves never came that night. After some discussion, Ji Yanran also figured that Madam Zhuang should not be lying. This was because Tian Dan's performance during the hunt really was abnormal. Besides, with Tian Dan's farsighted thinking, he would not have surrendered the initiative so passively that he required Lu Buwei's protection.

In the grand scheme of things, Tian Dan would not have believed that Lu Buwei could kill Xiang Shaolong, although Lu Buwei was almost successful.

That is why Dan Chu's returning troops would have made the necessary arrangements to support him, even counter-attacking by laying traps for any tailing enemies. It was nonetheless unlikely that they knew of the existence of Xu Yiluan's troops in waiting in ambush.

Finally, Xiang Shaolong decided to dispatch two guardians, the recently recovered Wu Da and Dan Quan (from Pu Bu and Liu Chao's unit), to use fast horses to intercept Teng Yi. They were to advise Teng Yi to change his whole battle plan into delaying Tian Dan's troops but not attacking.

This will delay Tian Dan's return to Qi, giving them more opportunities to kill him.

As the Liu Shi brothers and Dan Chu are not at Tian Dan's side, Tian Dan's defensive web is now at its weakest.

Early the next morning, before they de-camped, Madam Zhuang led her two sisters over to discuss the details of Shouchun City.

They had all removed their veils. Youcui and Younging turned out to be outstandingly beautiful sisters, but they were still half a step below the uniquely charming Madam Zhuang.

Madam Zhuang smiled and said, "They are indeed my younger sisters, just that they are not my blood sisters but belong to the Zhuang family."



She then warmly greeted Ji Yanran the two women and expressed her admiration before turning back to the main topic, mentioning, "Li Yuan has no lack of underlings who recognize Mister Xiang. The Talented Lady Ji is an even more reknown personality in Shouchun. Therefore we need to rely on some disguises to fool the Chu people."

Xiang Shaolong caressed his cheek and jaw, saying, "I can grow a full beard and restrict my movements to the night. That way I can avoid the eyes and ears of people."

Madam Zhuang said, "Avoiding people is not difficult. The problem is that if we cannot move about freely, it will be even harder to find an opportunity to kill Tian Dan. Fortunately these two sisters of mine are most familiar with the techniques to change appearances. They can play some tricks with Mister Xiang's face. Unless you come face to face with familiar people, you should be able to deceive anyone."

Ji Yanran said, "What identity should he use when meeting people?"

Madam Zhuang said, "You can act as my brother Wan Duanguang. Because he was seriously injured during the mutiny, he escaped out of Chu's borders, but never recovered and passed away three months ago. There should not be anyone in Shouchun who recognizes him."

While she spoke normally, everyone could detect an unappeasable hatred and enmity in her voice.

Zhao Zhi sorrowfully pointed out, "As Madam returns to Yunnan to deal with the enemy, how confident is she?"

Madam Zhuang replied nonchalantly, "Originally I did not have half a hope. But since I had my back to the wall, I had no choice but to take advantage of Chu's period of weakness and return with my son to fight a life and death battle with the thief; but now that I have Xiang Shaolong, I have every confidence of success."

Xiang Shaolong forced a smile and said, "Madam thinks too highly of me."

Madam Zhuang smiled and said, "You'd better start addressing me as your elder sister from now on and I will address you as Duanguang. It is still another month's journey from here to Shouchun. I will describe Duanguang's bitter life story to you in detail. Thankfully Duanguang is famous in the Northwest as a heroic general. He's always had a formidable reputation. It is most appropriate for you to pass off as him. Because we are originally from Yunnan, we do not speak with the Chu accent. As long as you study diligently, we should be able to fool the Chu people."

Xiang Shaolong mused that the last time he disguised himself as Dong Horse Fanatic, while this time he is playing the heroic general Wan Duanguang. It would be so thrilling if he could fool Tian Dan again.

Ji Yanran, being the most attentive to detail, asked, "What identity is Madam Zhuang using to enter the Chu capital this time?"

Madam Zhuang said, "I have a good friend in Lord Chunshen's house by the name of Weng. In those days, as

King Xiaolie feared our Yunnan's growth to become the hegemon of the Southeast, he forced Li Ling to conspire with the Ye Lang people to overthrow the Zhuang family. In one night, close to ten thousands of the Zhuang clan was murdered. Lord Chunshen tried to prevent this, but could not prevail over King Xiaolie. If he had not sent people to assist us, we could have forgotten about escaping from Chu's borders. That is why on this trip we should first visit Lord Chunshen's home."

Xiang Shaolong and Yanran exchanged a glance and let go of their worries.

Now that King Xiaolie is dead, Chu is going to become a battleground between Lord Chunshen and Li Yuan. To someone like Madam Zhuang who is close to Lord Chunshen, killing Li Yuan's associate Tian Dan is naturally no big deal.

Xiang Shaolong's spirit rose, saying, "Good! Let us leave!"

Zhao Zhi was displeased, saying, "Madam has yet to say how Sister Yanran and I should disguise ourselves!"

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Of course it is to be me, Wan Duanguang's lovely wives. Covering your faces with thicker veils will solve all the problems."

All along, before a strong Qin arose, amongst all the states, Chu was in the South with no enemies nearby. That is why regardless of the physical security or the economy, they have had safety and stability where the other states hadn't.

In addition, the soil in the South was fertile. Surrounding Lake Dongting were endless tracts of fertile land waiting to be developed by the Chu people. This caused the Chu people to be rich and worry free.

At their peak, Chu possessed all the territories from Yuan and Xiang rivers in the South to Ying and Si in the North, and from Ba and Shu in the West to the Tan city and the river Huai in the East. Treating Ying and Ru as ditches and Jiang and Han as ponds; as flat as Zhenglin, as continuous as Fangcheng. By the time the Warring States Period began, they had almost unified the entire South, becoming the largest and most powerful state.

Besides swallowing numerous smaller countries, they had also expanded into large tracts of land belonging to the non-Han barbarians in the East, South and Southwest, subjecting these lands and peoples to Chu's culture and civilization.

Just as Ji Yanran had analyzed nonetheless, to govern so many ethnic groups and such a vast expanse of land required a powerful and competent government.

It was a pity that after King Zidao and King Xuan, Chu had never had a competent ruler again. In addition, with King Huai dying destitute in Qin, the central authorities lost their power while the regional powers rose up.

King Xiaolie's subsequent instigation of the mutiny in Yunnan reduced central control even further. In the end, he did not manage to change anything, merely changing the name of the Yunnan king from Zhuang to Li, that's all.

Now that King Xiaolie has passed away, internal strife has appeared once again. And due to the freak combination of factors, Xiang Shaolong is compelled to join this "game".

While the news of Chu's chaos may be unexpected, it was actually inevitable. If not for the fact that Qin had just lost two kings in quick succession, and that Xiao Pan was still immature, and for the Qin military's free-for-all fight with Lu Buwei, and even more for Qin's need to concentrate on defending the three Eastern counties, Chu would have been forced even further South.

Chu's people have become leisurely and carefree due to their wealth, and have been at odds with the solemn and tense Northerners all along.

This was very vividly described by Ji Yanran.

After leaving the Qinling mountains and after two days march on uneven roads, they finally reached the Hanzhong plains.

While one of Madam Zhuang's household chiefs led the two men Dan Quan and Wu Guang to meet Teng Yi, everyone else set out for Shouchun.

Ji Yanran rode alongside Xiang Shaolong and started discussing Chu's culture, saying, "Even though Chu is the enemy of my lost country, I have always admired Chu's culture. Looking at their religious beliefs, they do not follow the callous god of farmers, but worship the aspiring and high flying god of fire; their river goddess is a beautiful woman that makes the soul long for her. The other gods are either

colorful and bewitching girls or passionate and self-sacrificing heroes. Even more, the songs of Chu are full of euphemism and rhetoric, melancholic yet beautiful, leaving one with lingering emotions."

Xiang Shaolong became a little jealous, said, "But I've never found any trace of such beautiful things on Li Yuan."

Ji Yanran laughed delicately and rolled her eyes, but could not help smiling, said, "He wasn't trying to woo you, why would he want to show you his literary talent?"

Exhaling her breath of magical air, she smugly but joyfully said, "Its good that Hubby rarely speaks with such jealousy."

At this moment, Madam Zhuang sent someone to ask them to fall back, and taking advantage of the uneventful journey, to teach them the local accent. Xiang Shaolong and his party could only bear with it and took instructions.

During that period in the Warring States era, the most fashionable language was Zhou. All the different states' royalty and anyone with any amount of status used this language to communicate.

Nonetheless, due to differences in the regions, the Zhou language was always mixed with local dialects and slangs.

That is why one could guess a person's origins just from his speech.

Of the Warring States, the most alike were Zhao, Wei and Han. This was because these three states were splintered from the former Jin state.

Because Qin's culture was shallow, and also because of its proximity to the three Jin states, the Qin accent and slang was similar to the three states'.

The most distinctive state was actually Chu.

Up to today, Chu's people have been ridiculed as the "Southern Barbarians", and their difference in choice of words is even greater. That is why it is important for Xiang Shaolong's party to swallow this little bit of pain to learn the Yunnan variant of the Chu language.

Chu's locus of influence centered on the vast regions on the Yangtze River's two banks and the vast Lake Dongting, stretching South.

Shouchun is North of the Yantze River on the West bank of the River Huai. This is more than a thousand miles East of the old capital Ying, which was originally situated on the Northwest corner of Lake Dongting. Although this allowed the capital to be safely removed from Qin, it demonstrated a lack of fighting spirit on the part of the Chu people. It was no wonder that even though Chu was big, it was the most contemptible in the eyes of the three states.

After a three day journey, having crossed the Tongbai montains, they reached Chengyang city on the Western end of the River Huai. They found a guest house to lodge in before sending Zhuang Kong out to buy a boat. The boat would reduce the ardor of their journey.

Since they had to adopt high ranking identities to enter the city, the current governor Qushen sent staff to pay an official

call right after they had let down their luggage and stabled their horses

Xiang Shaolong naturally left Madam Zhuang to manage this, choosing to remain in his room and amusing himself with his two lovely wives, greatly enjoying this return to civilization.

Madam Zhuang soon came over and sat down on a mat, happily saying, "We have solved the problem of the boat. Once the governor Official Qu found out who I was, he was very helpful."

The Madam Zhuang who had put on a long robe once again exuded charm.

The robe she was wearing was the most fashionable at that time, a dark robe. It was a one piece robe stretching from top to bottom with the right lapel joined at an angle. Wrapping from the front to the back, it caused beautiful women to exude a certain charm. She had combed her hair in a 'descending horse topknot', pulling her delicate hair behind her forehead in a low-hanging knot, looking very much like she had just descended from horseback. Adding to her charming demeanor, she bent her waist in a graceful step, creating a sight not to be missed.

Xiang Shaolong cautioned himself never to fall for this beautiful woman, else he would be giving himself a lot of trouble in the future. Moreover, as a man from the 21st Century, he is already very satisfied to have his many lovely wives. He should be more devoted to Ji Yanran and all his wives. Ji Yanran was also sizing up this enchanting and



elegant beauty. Apparently feeling a little threatened, she said unenthusiastically, "I once stayed in Shouchun for a short while. I wonder at present, which of the four peoples, Dou, Cheng, Yuan and Qu hold the most power?"

Xiang Shaolong immediately thought of Qu Yuan (a famous Warring States statesman). So this lord is actually from one of the four main ethnic groups in Chu. No wonder he is able to become an important official.

Madam Zhuang's beautiful eyes swept over Xiang Shaolong before saying, "The four big ethnic groups are no longer as industrious as before. It is Li Yuan's ethnic group that has been rising up. Of course it is the most powerful group outside the four big groups. Moreover since Li Yuan became the crown prince, the Li clan has been rising with the tide. Now that Li Yuan has actually managed to counter the Empress Dowager who wields real power, who will not curry favor with the Li clan?"

Xiang Shaolong saw that Madam Zhuan understood Shouchun's situation thoroughly and could not help but ask, "Did Li Yuan bring back Guo Kai's daughter Guo Xiu'er as wife?"

Madam Zhuang nodded and said, "Indeed. I even heard that she is expecting, earning Li Yuan's considerable affection."

Xiang Shaolong's attention couldn't help drifting to the phoenix shaped jade pendant hanging on his chest. This was the object that Guo Xiu'er gave to him before obeying her

father's command to marry Li Yuan. Thinking about it, he couldn't help feeling a little torn and dejected!

Madam Zhuang gazed at him deeply, then lowered her head, as if trying to discern what secret reason he had to ask about Guo Xiu'er.

The two ladies Ji and Zhao knew about the relationship between him and Guo Xiu'er and paid no notice to it. The former asked, "Did Guo Zhong move his business over?"

Madam Zhuang cracked her eyebrow, saying, "I am not too sure about this."

Xiang Shaolong felt that the atmosphere had changed, and changing the topic, he asked, "Is there one Madam Xie amongst the Wang people? Lady Huayang once asked me to deliver a gift to her, but I never reached Chu in the end."

Madam Zhuang nodded her head and said, "I can't be sure, but if she has some connection to my aunt, it must be Madam Qing Xiu. Her good looks are famous in Chu. She was married to the great general Dou Jie. Initially Dou Jie loved and pampered her, but later he was enchanted by the Minister-of-State Cheng Suning's concubine Yan Fei. In a fit of anger, Madam Qing Xiu left and moved to a house beside the Huai river in the outskirts of the city, thereafter leading a secluded life. With the threat of suicide, she forbade Dou Jie from entering the front gate by even half a step. Her resolve earned the Chu people's respect. Dou Jie lost King Xiaolie's favor after that. Now that he has attached himself to the Li

clan though, his trajectory seems to have improved somewhat."

Zhao Zhi was puzzled and asked, "Since that Yan Fei was the Minister-of-State Cheng Suning's beloved concubine, how did she get involved with Dou Jie?"

Madam Zhuang contemptuously replied, "Of all people this Cheng Suning spineless. Dou Jie was an important military official. With just a hinted request from Dou Jie, he obediently offered up Yan Fei. As our Zhuang family returns, the greatest obstacle to us is the group of people led by Li Yuan. This is because Li Ling is precisely Li Yuan's older paternal cousin and fellow clan member."

Xiang Shaolong couldn't help feeling excited, but before he could open his mouth, Wu Yan knocked on the door seeking an audience. As he entered, he had a serious look on his face, saying, "Something is not right. Just now we detected a suspicious person in the vicinity investigating us. Later when official Qu Shen left, he hid in a carriage with another suspicious person on the streets outside and had a long discussion. Afterwards, all those suspicious people withdrew."

Madam Zhuang's expression did not change as she listened.

Xiang Shaolong was able to smile unhurriedly and said, "Looks like they intend to deal with us while we are on the boat. As long as they bore a hole in the boat and sink us, their men can murder your son in the water. Our plan to

return to your country is about to fail. We must think this through carefully."

Madam Zhuang said, "What should we do then? The boatman and helmsmen are all their people."

Ji Yanran wittily said, "As long as we can leave Cheng Yang, we can have the boat without the people. We'll see what Qu Shen is able to do to us then."

At dawn, the official Qu Shen came personally to send them off. Three sails were masted on the large boat. They set sail following the current.

There were thirty boatmen on the boat, all valiant and strong. On the surface they looked respectful, but one could tell that they had malicious intent. Nonetheless Xiang Shaolong did not worry about them, having scheduled twelve of the guardians to spy on them continuously for twelve hours. They spent their time alternately learning Chu with the Yunnan flavor and taking the chance to rest. All this to allow them to reach Tian Dan as quickly as possible once they reached Shouchun, and then to quickly leave after.

He was not too worried that his real identity will be revealed. This is because Tian Dan and Li Yuan and their associates were all high officials. Even if he, being a general who had lost his home, deliberately sought an appointment with them, it would be difficult to get an opportunity. That is why the odds of bumping into them accidentally are tiny.

The only difficulty is how to obtain Tian Dan's whereabouts.

The scenery of the South is not much different from that of the Northwest, picturesque and mesmerizing.

It is the time between Spring and Summer and the boat is sailing freely. The distant forests of Pingshan divided on the left and right. In the middle of the peaceful landscape, the crystal clear waters of the river flowed in a torrent.

As they followed the river down, they frequently saw fishing boats fishing in the middle of the river. it was hard to associate this scene with the endless ferocious battles of the Warring States era.

Over the meandering river, as they negotiated each bend, a different scene appeared before them, preventing them from being bored.

As there were outsiders present, the two ladies Ji and Zhao wore caps which covered their faces, adding to their yearning, mysterious beauty.

Those malicious boatmen kept eyeing their silky bosoms and curvy buttocks, evidently harboring lewd intentions on the women, in addition to murder.

It is not clear whether it was because of Chu's forced relocation, but of the cultural differences between Chu and the three Jin states plus Qin, the most obvious was that in Chu when married women left the house, they would put on all kinds of veils, being unaffected by the inconvenience and obstruction.

Besides putting on a cap and a veil, they also used a handkerchief to cover their bunned up hair. They then lengthen these once again to cover their faces. These are invariably thinly spread and made of muslin. The texture is frivolous and once it is put on the face, it gives the wearer mysterious aura with its translucence, adding to the wearer's fascination and attractiveness.

If beauties like Yanran and Zhao Zhi put these on, they would become exceedingly beautiful, causing Xiang Shaolong to wish for night to come so that he could see more.

After the last few days, Xiang Shaolong has grown an inch-long beard, not only changing his appearance, but also increasing his imposing aura. It was very common for people in that era to leave beards, with scholars and officials sporting especially long beards; but with military leaders leaving short ones, therefore bare-faced men were instead uncommon.

As Xiang Shaolong was enjoying the beautiful scenery with his two women at the front of the boat, Zhuang Kong came over to his side and said in a low voice, "Before we reach the upper reaches of Qi Si county, there is a stretch where the water is rapid and deep, with dangerous interlinking shoals and precipices. It is the best place for those thieves to make their move."

Xiang Shaolong said in a low voice, "When will we reach that point?"

Zhuang Kong replied, "We should reach there after dark."

After Zhuang Kong left, Xiang Shaolong faced the river and sighed. Zhao Zhi was instantly surprised and said, "Is Hubby worrying over these few petty thieves?"

Xiang Shaolong forced a smile and said, "They may be petty thieves, but they have ruined my grand plans to carouse on the couch with my two lovely wives tonight. How can I not let out a sign of resentment?"

The two ladies laughed excitedly, looking unspeakably captivating.

## CHAPTER 10

*Another Sudden Change*

[Translated by YEONGWEE]

THE EVENING brought sudden showers which lasted half the night. Though the rain lightened eventually, an unending sheet of water covered the ground, and the sky was covered by thick dark clouds, creating a heavy dreary atmosphere.

Xiang Shaolong together with his two lovely wives, Madam Zhuang, Youcui and Youning, and the child Zhuang Baoyi were all in the cabin sharing a meal.



This is the first time the two parties have shared a meal together since they met, demonstrating that they have grown a little bit closer.

Zhuang Baoyi periodically looked at Xiang Shaolong with earnest admiration. Ji Yanran favored the child the most and couldn't help but ask, "What is the Little Master thinking of?"

Zhuang Baoyi blushed instantly and lowered his head, replying, "Baoyi hopes to be Mister Xiang's disciple, to learn the sword."

Madam Zhuang and Youcui Youning the two women smiled and silently awaited Xiang Shaolong's response. Xiang Shaolong could not bear to hurt a little child's feelings, not to mention that his circumstances were desperate. He smiled and said, "Are you able to endure hardship?"

Zhuang Baoyi puffed up his little chest boldly and said, "Baoyi is most able to endure suffering. If you do not believe me, you may ask my mother."

Madam Zhuang exultantly said, "If he is able to learn from the number one swordsman West of Qin and the master of the king of Qin, this woman will be grateful to tears. Baoyi, quickly go pay your respects and offer the formal rites."

Baoyi immediately raised his clasped hands in the formal rite before sitting down again. The atmosphere had turned even friendlier. Xiang Shaolong knew that his spiritual and mental responsibility to the Zhuang family has now increased by three parts.

Recalling that even if Zhuang Baoyi is able to ascend the Yunnan throne, he cannot escape his other disciple Xiao Pan's destruction of his country. He did not know whether to be happy or sad.

Madam Zhuang kept glancing at him with her charming eyes. The other two ladies Youcui and Youning also ogled at him occasionally. Thankfully they were noblewomen, else their looks would have been even more seductive and their words more suggestive.

Xiang Shaolong did not mind responding, but it was more important to honor Ji and Zhao the two lovely wives, so he was careful that his bearing and words did not overstep his boundaries. Hence, while the meal appeared exciting, only he was aware of his difficulties.

At this moment, Wu Guang rushed in and whispered into Xiang Shaolong's ear, "We found chiseling tools and a large jar of flammable oil at the bottom of the boat. It seems that this pack of sons of bitches wish to sink the boat and set fire to it at the same time, attacking us from both angles."

Madam Zhuang and the rest quietly listened to the exchange between Xiang Shaolong and Wu Guang.

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Did you manage to listen in on their conversations?"

Under Xiang Shaolong's planning, they had been equipped with all kinds of original eavesdropping devices, like the so named 'next-door ear' which was a copper cylinder shaped

like a horn. This can be placed on a wall to amplify sounds from the other side, allowing one to listen in secretly.

Wu Guang indiscriminately said, "Of course we heard. Even their sounds of taking a dump and taking a leak cannot escape us."

The women all blushed at those words. Zhao Zhi was annoyed and said, "Little Guang, can you please restrain yourself a little?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed and said, "Quick, say it out!"

Wu Guang first apologized to Zhao Zhi, then said, "Their leader is called Cheng Xi, and he is the relative of the Minister of State Cheng Suning's relative. From their tone of voice, it seems that they already knew Madam and her party would be heading for Shouchun these few days, and have deliberately waited here patiently for an entire month, seeking to murder everyone. Hei, I also feel like saying the same to them."

As Madam Zhuang heard this, her expression changed slightly, but she lowered her head and remained silent. Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is there anything else? Did they mention when they would make their move?"

Wu Guang joyfully said, "Of course not. But they were not able to hide from us experts that they had prepared sedatives and mixed it in the water. Once they have drugged us, they would rape all the women then scuttle the boat while setting fire at the same time."

As Madam Zhuang the three women heard the sensitive word 'rape', even their eyelids turned red.

This time even Ji Yanran scolded, "Wu Guang, your mouth is really dirty, and you are extremely lacking in manners!"

Zhao Zhi was actually worried about something else and asked, "Is there anything wrong with the water we are drinking now?"

Wu Guang replied, "Of course there is no problem. Water that has been drugged has a strange smell/taste that needs to be masked by tea. Later if they bring a pot of tea over to entertain Madam, you definitely mustn't drink it."

Wu Guang's vulgar humor reminded Xiang Shaolong of Wu Guo's refined humor, and even more couldn't help thinking of Zhao Ya. Has Wu Guo been able to bring Zhao Ya safely to Xianyang? This beauty has suffered greatly.

Amidst the laughter and scolding, Wu Guang was chased away by Zhao Zhi. Ji Yanran apologized to Madam Zhuang and the rest for Wu Guang's vulgar words.

Madam Zhuang did not mind, and even said, "People like little brother Guang are authentic. Your servant has met many people who are sanctimonious and verbally full of benevolence, but have been secretly harmed by them without even knowing what it was all about."

Ji Yanran said, "Madam's present trip back to Chu should have been a secret, how did Cheng Suning hear about this, such that he even sent men here to plot against you?"

Madam Zhuang said in distress, "Nowadays I am unable to fathom who my enemies really are."

At this moment, someone did indeed knock on the door. This person kneeled down and said, "Your servant has specially come to offer Chengyang's speciality, 'soothing tea'. The flavor may be a bit odd, but once you've drunk it you'll be relaxed and unafraid of the wind and the waves. It is a special offering from the governor Official Qu to Madam and the young master."

Madam Zhuang pretended to be elated and accepted the gift.

After the person had left, Xiang Shaolong leaned over to Zhao Zhi's delicate ear and said, "Those people are really cooperative. We will have unbridled enjoyment tonight!"

Zhao Zhi could not imagine that Xiang Shaolong would say such naughty things to her in such a public setting and blushed instantly.

As she saw their loving exchange, Madam Zhuang's originally bright and sparkling eyes started to tear.

Before the battle has started, she has already lost.

As Xiang Shaolong and the rest pretended faint from drinking the drugged tea, the pack of scoundrels finally revealed their ferocious faces. Using silent and lightning quick moves, the guardians knocked them down, subdued them and tied the lot of them up.

The boat has landed in their hands.

Xiang Shaolong followed Madam Zhuang up on deck. He instructed the guardians to put the murdering scoundrels in a row and proceeded to interrogate them.

The two banks of the river are shrouded in darkness. Though the rain has stopped, there was not a star in sight.

Xiang Shaolong coldly said, "Who is Cheng Xi?"

The thirty bound enemies could not imagine that they already knew the name Cheng Xi, and were all startled. Nonetheless they all closed their mouths and remained silent with a defiant expression that implied 'do you really dare to kill me?'.

Xiang Shaolong quietly sighed, turned to Madam Zhuang and said, "Madam, please turn your head and avoid looking."

Madam Zhuang steadied herself and said, "I am not afraid!"

Xiang Shaolong made a signal, and Wu Shu who was behind the prisoners put his leg on the back of one of them. As the prisoner's arms and legs were tied together, he fell forward immediately and rolled on the floor.

From Xiang Shaolong's side, Jing Shan rushed over and put his foot on the prisoner's back, drawing his long sword with a 'Qiang' sound. Coming close to him, he said, "This is your last chance, who is Cheng Xi!"

That person would not yield and spat with a 'pie!' sound, giving a disdainful look.

Jing Shan laughed coldly and waved his long sword. Blood splashed from that person's throat and he died violently under the long sword.

With a 'dong dong' sound like rain, two of the prisoners were so frightened that they fainted on the floor. The legs of the rest of the prisoners started to tremble and their faces turned pale. They did not think that the other party would be so merciless.

Madam Zhuang's face turned deathly white. She did not expect them to kill for real. She unconsciously leaned her delicate body against Xiang Shaolong. Jing Shan nonchalantly wiped his bloodstained blade on the dead man before allowing the corpse to be brought aside.

Zhuang Kong and the rest of Madam Zhuang's servants all bugged their eyes and stared blankly. Although killing in this era is no big deal to soldiers, but Jing Shan's calm cold-blooded attitude before and after the killing shocked both the enemy and themselves.

In those days when Xiang Shaolong selected his eighteen guardians, his one criterion was persistence and resolve. Only those who were not afraid to kill and be killed were entitled to be selected. In this era of conflict where the weak are eaten by the strong, showing mercy to the enemy is as good as being merciless to oneself. If it were them who were captured today, they would not have died so easily. This was especially so for Ji and Zhao and all the beauties.

Xiang Shaolong pointed at another person and said in a dead-pan voice, "Which one of you is Cheng Xi?"

That person's legs went limp and following his two colleagues slumped in a faint. His eyes went to a particularly dark and well built man. That man, knowing that his cover had been blown, stood forward and shouted, "You do not have to investigate any further, I am Cheng Xi. If you dare..."

'Peng!'

Wu Guang kicked forward and hit his nether regions. He bowed down in pain and collapsed on the floor, unable to speak anymore.

Xiang Shaolong laughed and said, "Bring him below deck to await punishment. Lets see how long he can hold out."

Wu Shu, Jing shan and the rest happily forced him away.

All the other captives looked as if their faces had been wrapped in mud, bodies trembling.

Xiang Shaolong said, "Split these guys up and interrogate them separately. Allow them to confess, but if anyone speaks half a sentence of falsehood or deliberately conceals anything, kill them immediately without pardon."

Zhuang Kong and the rest immediately swarmed around with the other guardians and brought the captives to different corners of the boat for interrogation.

Madam Zhuang's delicate body weakly leaned on Xiang Shaolong, and she said softly, "This is the first time I have



seen this kind of heavy and terrifying methods. Mister must have been too gentle with people in the past."

Xiang Shaolong lightly held her shoulders for a while and using a gentle voice, said, "Please return to the cabin and rest. By breakfast time tomorrow, we will have news from the interrogation."

Madam Zhuang looked like she was very reluctant to leave Xiang Shaolong's side and softly said, "What are we going to do with these people?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed bitterly and said, "I really wish to release all of them, but this will be the most foolish thing to do. Especially since they have seen our methods, they will be suspicious. Madam Zhang should understand my meaning."

At dawn there wasn't a captive left on the boat. The bloodstains had all been scrubbed away. As they were having breakfast in the master cabin, Xiang Shaolong said to Madam Zhuang, "It is not just Cheng Suning behind this matter, it also includes Dou Jie and a man called Fang Zhuo. Does Madam have any impression of him? It is reported that it was Fang Zhuo who reported Madam's return to Shouchun to Dou Jie and Cheng Suning."

Madam Zhuang's face turned white, saying, "Of course I recognize Fang Zhuo, he is one of Lord Chunshen's hangers-on. He has always been responsible for transmitting news to us. He has unexpectedly betrayed us."

Youcui said in a trembling voice, "Could Lord Chunshen be the mastermind behind the plot?"

Madam Zhuang shook her head determinedly and said, "Lord Chunshen definitely will not do such a thing, much less if Baoyi is able to regain the throne, it will bring him hundreds of benefits and not one drawback. Even more he is not this kind of base and despicable person. Looks like Fang Zhuo has been bought by Cheng Suning."

Ji Yanran asked, "Why does Cheng Suning and Dou Jie want young master dead?"

Madam Zhuang replied, "There are presently more than ten vassal states within Chu's borders. Amongst them, the four states Yunnan, Yelang, Minshan and Qielan are the biggest and strongest. They all have more than ten thousand troops each. The king of Chu is bound to have deep misgivings about them. While he would like to abolish the vassal lords, he does not dare to act rashly, fearing that the vassal lords will band together to resist Chu. And since our Zhuang family's prestige is highest in the country, we have the standing to lead all the vassal lords. That is why we were the first group that Xiaolie needed to deal with; nonetheless he does not dare to do this openly, and can only conspire with the traitor Li Ling to revolt. However, the Yunnan people's hearts are with us the Zhuang family. The other vassal lords are also vigorously supporting the restoration of the Zhuang family. If not how would the Li clan that Li Yuan represent allow us to return to our home country?"

Zhao Zhi said, "Since this is the case, as Madam heads to Shouchun on this trip, isn't it akin to sending the sheep into the lion's den?"

Madam Zhuang replied, "Right now, the most of the decision makers in Shouchun do not follow Li Yuan, but follow Lord Chunshen. Moreover, amongst the four big clans, besides legless people like Dou Jie and Cheng Suning who rely on the Li clan, the people are mostly dissatisfied with Li Ling as king of Yunnan. Even Li Yuan does not dare to support Li Ling openly. In fact the reason your servant's party is heading for Shouchun first is to formally request the Chu court to censure the illegal conduct of the traitorous Li Ling. This is because my deceased husband's family friend Weng is precisely one of the Chu court's policy makers."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly gleeful and said, "This is the best. I think Li Yuan must definitely try to delay matters. This is because if it is revealed that he had a hand in Li Ling's betrayal, all the vassal lords will realize their danger and seek to secede. Especially so, if we meet any unexpected misfortune, everyone will know who did it. That is when everything is revealed to the heavens, we will be safest."

Younging let out a giggle, and delicately laughed, "Mister Xiang's choice of words is very odd. What 'unexpected misfortune' and 'revealed to the heavens'. Nonetheless having heard these words, the description fits very well."

Of course Xiang Shaolong is aware of this problem, and obscured the issue by saying, "We should be able to relax a little these few days."

Madam Zhuang laughed, "No, it is actually time for you to put on your disguise."

Xiang Shaolong sat in front of a dressing table in the cabin looking at the mirror's reflection. His nose detected the fragrance of Youcui and Youning's body and clothes, feeling as if he had entered a nation of fragrances.

Youcui affectionately pressed on both his broad shoulders and knelt behind looking over his left shoulder, also looking at the reflection, saying, "Older sister did not exaggerate the skill that we two sisters once learned from Chu's number one makeup artist Miss Su Liu. We can turn any beautiful face ugly and any ugly face beautiful."

Xiang Shaolong felt her bosom pressing generously on his back. He was unable to endure it, yet was too embarrassed to ask her to move back, and to be honest, he really enjoyed it. He said, "But I am a man!"

Youning who was on the other side working with a few makeup kits said, "Chu's men love to make up. We used to do makeup for the great king everyday!"

After she said that, her expression turned gloomy. She must have remembered her late husband.

Youcui then said, "There are two kinds of face powder. One kind is made from ground rice grains infused with perfume. The other kind is pasty face resin called 'lead powder'. The latter is longer-lasting. As long as we apply it once per day, we can guarantee that no one will recognize you."

Xiang Shaolong secretly realized, No wonder the Chinese word for makeup 粉 comprises of the words 米 meaning

rice, and 分 meaning separate. It turns out that in this era, makeup is made from rice. He replied, "Has nobody ever met Wan Duanguang?"

The more Youcui looks at Xiang Shaolong, the more she was attracted to him, almost pasting her face on his cheek, her charming eyes like silk, said, "Wan Duanguang is from Yunnan, belonging to a clan from South Yunnan. Older sister is South Yunnan's number one beauty. She once followed our late father to Shouchun to meet the Chu king. Before escaping to Qin, Wan Duanguang had never set foot out of South Yunnan. Even Li Ling has never met him. It is difficult to find one person in Shouchun who recognizes him."

Xiang Shaolong reflected, No wonder the Yunnan people gave the Zhuang family so much support. It was because they used system of marriage. It need not be said that Zhuang wives all had the status of being the local clan leader's daughters. No wonder the Chu people were so fearful of Zhuang Baoyi's return to Yunnan.

Younging then came in front of Xiang Shaolong and carefully examined his face.

Xiang Shaolong said, "It is three more days to Shouchun, do the two Madams really need to start work now?"

Younging rolled her charming eyes once and said angrily, "We need to experiment to find out which method is best to change your appearance! We might even have to come up with a special formula. A few days might not even be enough."

The Youcui at his back sighed into his ear and with a 'ne' sound she asked, "Doesn't uncle like to be waited upon by us sisters? We know the techniques of Chinese massage and know best how to serve men."

Once she has finished speaking, she began to knead his shoulder muscles.

That is undeniably a very pleasurable experience. Moreover she is definitely an expert at this. Xiang Shaolong could not help laughing and groaning.

Younging flashed her charming sister an annoyed look, then raised a small cup with a glue-like white substance and started to stir it with a pestle. She said, "Your skin is relatively dark. Your servant will make it look like you have not been in the sun for a long time. This will allay people's suspicion."

She then carefully applied the 'lead powder' on his face. It was very cool and refreshing, plus she was using her delicate finger to massage it on, so for a moment, Xiang Shaolong forgot where he was.

Youcui who was at his back deliberated with her younger sister, "I think it is best to use some rouge to make his lip colour lighter and to make his eyebrows coarser. Then dye his beard and hair would be most appropriate."

Xiang Shaolong jumped in surprise, saying, "What if I can't return to my original appearance? Wouldn't that be terrible!"

Youcui laughed until her whole body collapsed onto his back and panted, saying, "What a vain man! You only have to use a special lotion to wash it, guaranteed everything will disappear."

Xiang Shaolong nervously looked at the person that was gradually materialising in the mirror and said, "If I become some gaudily made up guy, you can forget about me appearing outdoors in broad daylight."

The two ladies laughed until they had to bend down. Younging took the opportunity to bury her head in his chest.

Youcui then said, "The highest form of makeup is to cause people to think that there is no makeup. If you do not believe, take a look at us and elder sister!" Xiang Shaolong looked at the two of them a few times. Indeed they did not look heavily made-up. He then put his mind at ease, whole heartedly enjoying the two delicious women's service.

After Younging had completed his facial make-up, she began to draw on his eyebrows and emotionally said, "Of the men that my sisters and I have met, Mister Xiang is the nobleman who observes the most propriety. But do you know that your two servant sisters are perfectly happy to wait upon Sir Xiang."

Youcui who was at his back then started to dismantle the hero's ornaments on his head and said, "Thinking that after we reach Yunnan, your servant sisters will have to split with Sir Xiang leads us to feel dispirited. But thinking about the

love that our late father gave to us, your servant sisters' gain and losses count as nothing!"

Xiang Shaolong did not think that they would reveal their feelings openly and felt a little moved. If they had not met him, Madam Zhuang's entire party would no doubt have been killed, and even more the women would have had to suffer insult. The three ladies are nonetheless returning to Chu on behalf of their late husbands without a second thought. Such real self-sacrificing valor calls for one's veneration.

As he was wondering how to answer them, Madam Zhuang came in with the company of Zhao Zhi to have a look at him.

Zhao Zhi almost couldn't recognize her husband. She was astounded and said, "Elder sisters Cui and Ning are brilliant, looks like I and Sister Yanran should get a makeover too."

Madam Zhuang said, "As long as you dye your hair a little grey, you will look approximately ten years older. And if you cover yourselves with a face towel, nobody will recognize you."

Xiang Shaolong looked at himself in the mirror. His confidence increased as he figured that even if he bumped into Li Yuan and Tian Dan face to face he could guarantee that they would not recognize him, especially if he put on some Yunnan style attire.



## CHAPTER 11

## Shouchun, The Chu Capital

[Translated by YEONGWEE]

AFTER the old Chu capital Ying was taken by the Qin general Bai Qi, Chu's King Qu retreated East in defeat. Twice they moved their capital, getting further away from Qin.

The land East of the River Huai originally belonged to the Chen state, but was conquered by Chu. As a result, King Xiang absorbed Chen's soldiers, numbering a hundred thousand. After recovering their former strength, they seized fifteen cantons back from Qin, and regained their impetus.

Yesteryear when they united the other four states to attack Qin and defeated Meng Ao's soldiers, the Qin people sealed their passes and did not dare to face their attack. It appeared that overnight, Chu had regained the position of hegemony they enjoyed during the Spring and Autumn era.

In the end, even though Chu had lost a large piece of their territory, their territory was deep so it was difficult for the Qin people to continue attacking. This allowed Chu to rise again despite their retreat.

Shouchun is situated to the North of the Huai river. Compared to two other strategic posts Cai Cheng and Jia Jiang, it had better communication links. The Chu people also had deep foundations in this area, with no shortage of manpower and natural resources. Therefore they had another grand occasion (setting up a new capital). At that time, they really had greater momentum than all the other Northeastern countries. The capital Shouchun is especially big, with walls that look like a winnowing basket. The city is more than thirty miles wide, and the outer walls are fifty miles wide. It could be said to be one of the greatest cities of that time, its scale being second only to Xianyang. It was also protected by four city walls. With more than twenty thousand households, it was unusually prosperous.

In addition, the river valley was fertile, hence there was abundant food. This caused Shouchun to become Chu's most bustling metropolis after succeeding Ying as capital. All the most important buildings were concentrated in the central inner castle; the palace, the court arena, government

storehouses, government treasury, temple of the ancestors, the earth deity and the harvest deity, and lodging houses for high officials and foreign emissaries were all in this area. The outer city is criss-crossed with streets, with an orderly distribution of residences, mausoleums, guest houses and shops.

Shouchun's city defenses are tight. At the entrance of the city wall, there is a portcullis that could be raised or lowered. It is surrounded by a moat and is guarded by Chu soldiers day and night. All who pass through the city gates must pay taxes.

As Xiang Shaolong and his party approached the pier outside the city, they were cut off by a Chu warship. Only after inspecting Madam Zhuang's credentials did they allow them to anchor at the pier. They were still not allowed to go ashore while another group of officials entered the city to make a report.

They could only wait onboard the ship patiently.

At this moment, Xiang Shaolong had changed into a loose-fitting gown to disguise his healthy and beautiful body. His hair and beard was mottled with grey patches to simulate premature aging. His complexion was pale and his eyebrows were so thick as to obscure his eyes. Compared to the former Dong Horse Fanatic, he now looked even more unlike Xiang Shaolong.

After waiting half a day, they finally saw a convoy of carriages leave the city towards them. They were led by a big

fatty, wearing official dress. He was about fifty with slender eyes and a big nose. He looked a little like a second generation lord whose spirit and body had been corroded by wine and women.

Madam Zhuang was waiting respectfully on board the ship, and spoke quietly to Xiang Shaolong who was beside her, "That fatty is Lord Chunshen Huang Xie."

Xiang Shaolong's heart took a turn. In the beginning he still thought it was some kind of lackey from Huang Xie's house, how was he to know that it was Huang Xie himself?

Amongst the four princes of the Warring States era, Xiang Shaolong has only met Prince Xinling. Nonetheless it looks like Huang Xie has the worst appearance amongst them. No wonder he is the least famous of the four princes.

As he thought about how Zhao Mu, who did not look like him at all, tried to kill him, he felt a little queasy.

Ji Yanran who was on his other side said, "He seems to have grown a little fatter since the last time I saw him."

Xiang Shaolong finally awoke to the fact that Ji Yanran had been here, and trembled. If Chunshen spots her, since he was the enemy who killed his son, they will be exterminated immediately.

Thankfully Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi look nothing like the original after they had been made up and had put on Chu style clothes.

Compared to the other countries, the women's clothes of Chu look extra spacious and gorgeous. A long cheongsam that drags on the ground, with a white cummerbund on the waist, an oblique collar, pleats extending to the back, broad sleeves and lower hem, hats on top of the head with a ribbon under the chin. All these together with their heavily powdered faces gave the Chu women an exotic air.

As for the two ladies' hairdo, they were managed by Madam Zhuang and her two sisters. The fringes were neatly combed and the hair braided from the temples and pulled behind the head and the neck, forming two knots at the top of the head.

Just with this change of hairstyle, Xiang Shaolong failed to recognize them in a moment of confusion, much less with the slightly grizzled hair which caused them to look older by twenty years.

The five ladies' Chu style dresses were differentiated by their colours; vermillion, purplish red, firefly gold, plain green and natural indigo. In addition, there was embroidery with dragons, phoenix, birds and other motifs accompanied by twigs and branches, leaves and grass, flowers and plants, and geometric lines. The compositions were unique and vivid. This was a good illustration of the Chu people's rich imagination, colorful mythology and culture.

Men's clothes were relatively plain. The robes were long with uncovered legs. With a right overlapping lapel that intersects with the collar and wide loose sleeves, a tight cuff, with lines from the robe to the cuff, relying on deep black,

white and other colours to emphasize the design. The most eye-catching was the cummerbund, with different contrasting and alternating colours mixed together.

All the guardians changed into the uniform of Chu warriors. Jacket over the waist, crimp legged trousers, boots, with emblems sewn on the prominent places. Their hairstyles were all changed and they were all wearing Chu hats. They looked fairly interesting.

At this moment, Lord Chunshen arrived at the shore, made a signal to the men and invited them onshore.

Madam Zhuang, assisted by the two stout female servants, gracefully led the party ashore.

Perhaps Xiang Shaolong was overly sensitive, but he saw Lord Chunshen's narrow eyes brighten, firmly staring at her lovely waist, seeming to lust uncontrollably after the delicately beautiful Madam Zhuang, who looked like she could be broken by a light wind.

Huang Xie and his men descended their horses one after another.

Madam Zhuang has just paid her respects when she bitterly wailed, "The Lord needs to decide on behalf of your servant!"

Huang Xie immediately flailed his arms and legs and said, "Princess Wan, please do not be troubled. The government will give everything due consideration later."

Next his two squinty eyes flitted over Xiang Shaolong, seeming to be wary of a skilled person, said, "It's an honor to finally meet Mister Wan, and indeed he displays great talent."

This Lord is delighted.

Xiang Shaolong understood the principle that with a famous reputation, one did not need to be timid. Even though this Lord Chunshen indulges in wine and women, the moment one sees his eyes, one is able to tell that he is deep and shrewd, completely unlike his external appearance. He promptly controlled his voice and replied in his recently acquired Yunnan accented fashionable Zhou language of Chu, "Lord's formidable name shakes the whole earth. It should be Ruiguang who feels honored."

As Huang Xie's vision flitted across Ji Yanran and the various women, Madam Zhuang stopped wailing and introduced each member of the party.

Huang Xie realized that Ji Zhao the two women had 'entered the sunset years' and did not pay them anymore attention, instead sizing up Youcui and Youning the two women spiritedly. Lastly, his vision rested on Madam Zhuang. His voice turning gentle, he said, "Princess should first come to my home and rest. We can then discuss everything else at leisure."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly thought that if she had not met himself on this trip, Madam Zhuang and the two You sisters could only have relied on sexual entrapment. This was

because given Lord Chunshen's present display, it was clear that he was not really interested in helping them return to their country. One could make that conclusion just by seeing how he paid no attention to Zhuang Baoyi.

There were a few people behind Huang Xie who looked like lackeys. The rest were all valiant warriors.

Amongst the lackeys, there was one who was tall and big, with a beautiful beard that reached his chest. He had a long face with a crooked nose, extremely thin lips and two shining benevolent eyes that gave one a sense of amazement. He was carefully sizing up everyone, especially the exiled young heir apparent of Yunnan Zhuang Baoyi.

Zhuang Kong, who was behind Xiang Shaolong, saw him noticing the man and said softly, "That is Fang Zhuo!"

As Xiang Shaolong nodded faintly, Madam Zhuang's melodic voice said, "We should not bother the Lord. Your servant wishes to return to Yunnan's Prince's mansion."

Xiang Shaolong and the rest felt a little startled, and only then did they realize that the Zhuang family had an official residence in Shouchun.

Lord Chunshen betrayed an odd expression. He gave a dry cough and said, "Can we discuss this matter after we've returned to my home?"

Madam Zhuang's lovely body trembled a little. The delicate eyes behind the veil gazing at Lord Chunshen, said, "Lord, please may I know what is the matter?"



Lord Chunshen sighed and said, "Since the upheaval in Yunnan, Princess and the Little Prince hid in Qin, the Yunnan Prince's palace maids and servants have all dispersed. It was empty for a few years, but recently the Left Magistrate Li Chuangwen coveted the place, forced his way in and moved into the Prince's mansion. Although this Lord tried to negotiate with him many times, he held onto the late king's tacit promise and completely disregarded me. This Lord was also exceedingly dissatisfied."

Madam Zhuang's delicate body trembled severely and furiously said, "Where is heaven? The Lord must seek justice for your servant."

Lord Chunshen let out a bitter smile and softly said, "Sooner or later the Lord will teach this kid a lesson, but right now the situation is delicate. It is not advisable to act rashly. Princess is travel-worn, why don't you come to my home and rest first!"

Xiang Shaolong quietly called for joy. There are countless people now in Shouchun who want to see Zhuang Baoyi dead. Nonetheless, because of the involvement of the ten over vassal states, nobody dares to make a move. Therefore as long as they can make a reasonable stand, they can wreak havoc. Riding on the wave, he laughed loudly and said, "I appreciate the Lord's good intentions. This time our return to Shouchun is precisely to get some justice. If we are timid and fearful, how can we accomplish this big task of returning to our country? The Lord please return home first. We have our own plans."

Lord Chunshen was startled and looked at Xiang Shaolong.

Wan Ruiguang is South Yunnan's famous general and even more is the South Yunnan people's famous leader, gifted in both civil and military arts. He has a definite position in Chu. But unbelievably, he is so daring, showing clearly that he means to retake the Yunnan Prince's mansion.

Madam Zhuang's delicate body froze, and she almost raised her voice to stop him. Fortunately she remembered that Xiang Shaolong was an extraordinary man who possesses extraordinary methods, swallowing her words back into her stomach.

Lord Chunshen was worthy to be called one of the four great princes in the Warring States period. After muttering irresolutely for a while, replied, "This arbitrary and absurd act by Li Chuangwen was unpleasant to many people. It is because the Li clan interceded that the vassal states sent an envoy to lodge a formal protest, just that the late king sat on the issue. If General Wan does retake the Prince's mansion, nobody will dare say anything. Its just that there are many experts amongst Li Chuangwen's family commanders. It is hard to predict the outcome if a conflict arises. General Wan had better think twice<sup>4</sup>. It is inconvenient for this Lord to participate directly."

Xiang Shaolong was exultant. Since the circumstances was such, it was even more difficult to pass up this opportunity

---

<sup>4</sup> Actually in Chinese it is think thrice, but I think we should use the common English phrase

to demonstrate the Zhuang family's power and prestige. Once the common people realize that they have the ability to return to their country, because Yunnan is the chief of Chu's vassal states, even if the one holding power is Li Yuan, under the serious circumstances, he would have no choice but to help them settle this debt.

He coldly shouted and said, "On the contrary, I will go, even if up against countless people. Could the Lord first dispatch people to inform Li Chuangwen, saying we want the Yunnan Prince's mansion returned immediately. We will use 'diplomacy first then violence'."

This celebrated phrase from Meng Zi was something he learned in secondary school. Luckily the present circumstances allowed him to employ it, giving his study practical application.

A mysterious light shone in Lord Chunshen's eyes and he said, "Mister Wan is truly a towering figure. I, Huang Xie, am convinced. Come men!"

Fang Zhuo voluntarily stepped forward and greeted, saying, "Let your servant take care of this matter!"

Xiang Shaolong secretly laughed. Of course Fang Zhuo was going to tell Li Chuangwen and his experts how to give them a stiff battle.

But since they had Madam Zhuang and Zhuang Baoyi these two politically sensitive figures with them, no matter how many experts Li Chuangwen had, he would not dare to insult

the widow in front of the multitudes. When its one to one, he will teach him who's boss.

The Yunnan Prince's mansion is in the heart of the inner castle, next to the king's palace. The entire street was filled either with guesthouses for foreign envoys or offices of the vassal states' envoys. That is why Li Chuangwen's forced taking of the Yunnan Prince's mansion was extremely offensive, being King Xiaolie's ploy to reduce the say of the vassal states and their power.

As King Xiaolie is already dead, Li Chuangwen's actions have lost all support, indirectly furthering the Zhuang family's cause to recapture the official residence.

All along, the court of the Chu king has always made the excuse that Li Ling's rebellion was an internal affair of Yunnan, having nothing to do with the Chu court. Of course they did not officially recognize Li Ling's position so as to avoid provoking the other vassal states into disgust and secession.

If the vassal states were to submit to a strong Qin, Chu will lose the protective screen of the Southwest, thus greatly endangering the country.

With the backing of these advantageous situations, Xiang Shaolong is resolved to free his hand and create an epic work. The first person to be operated on will be Li Chuangwen.

Since he was not able to raise his hands and kill for real, Xiang Shaolong had borrowed a bundle of heavy wooden

staves from Lord Chunshen and hidden them under Madam Zhuang's carriage before heading for the Yunnan Prince's mansion.

When they reached the Yunnan Prince's mansion, they found the gates wide open. More than two hundred warriors lined up on the field in front of the mansion. The display was indeed meant to intercept and intimidate their trivial delegation of just over forty people which included women and children.

It is the afternoon and the streets thronged with people, with no shortage of high ranking chancellors and ministers who live in the area, and also dignitaries from the Northeastern states and vassal states here to pay their respects to the late King Xiaolie. Seeing this kind of warlike display, everyone gathered round the mansion to watch the spectacle. Within a short time, there gathered a multitude of people. The atmosphere was boisterous.

With a solitary Xiang Shaolong at the head, the group determinedly tried to enter the Yunnan Prince's mansion.

There was someone on the stairs leading up to the mansion, shouting, "The approaching group please halt. Why are you breaking into my mansion?"

Xiang Shaolong and his party orderly and slowly dismounted their horses. The opposing two hundred over soldiers sealed off all their routes in a pincer movement. The main force was concentrated at the front gate of the mansion.

The sign at the top of the platform had been changed into horizontal tablet that said "The Honourable Magistrate Li's Mansion".

He laughed coldly, "Who has plundered and occupied my Yunnan Prince's official residence? Report the name to me Wan Ruiguang."

That person, clearly being Li Chuangwen, was dressed in martial dress and looked quite powerful. Its a pity that he looked tacky and vulgar and his eyes were disproportionately small. His hands grasped his sword hilt and, laughing aloud, he said, "This is really laughable. The Yunnan king was unable to rule his country and was killed by his people five years ago. Where did you find this Yunnan king?"

Xiang Shaolong's worries decreased even more. Even the people of the Li clan do not dare to admit brazenly that Li Ling has succeeded the throne to avoid the calamity of having all the vassal states' revolt.

At this moment, Madam Zhuang and the women and children are still in the carriage, being protected by the Ji and Zhao the two women guardians while Zhuang Kong and his party are outside guarding the carriage, allowing the rest to make their moves without worry.

Xiang Shaolong's eye gave a cold flash, and he shouted loudly saying, "What audacity! The heir apparent of my house is here. Who dares claim the king of Yunnan is not here? You, the mad man who has occupied the Yunnan

King's residence by force, do you dare to follow me to debate this in front of the great king, to verify the state seal and official documents proving that Yunnan belongs to my family's heir apparent?"

Li Chuangwen smiled sardonically and said, "You are the mad man. Who knows if you are a confused official or a thief, manufacturing some false evidence to brag and swindle people. Quickly get lost. If not I will break all your dog legs."

The street immediately burst into an uproar. All the observers expressed dissatisfaction with Li Chuangwen's harsh and barbaric ways. It was apparent that this person was normally despotic and unreasonable, offending many and pleasing few.

At this point Xiang Shaolong deliberately exhibited a timid attitude and said, "If you still do not believe me, I will personally visit the Empress Dowager to fight for some justice right now."

In order for Li Chuangwen to seize power, how could he spare them? He laughed heartily and said, "Do you think it is that easy for you to leave? I will first tie you up and then bring you to the Empress Dowager!"

Another round of heckling came from outside the mansion. Li Chuangwen was really too much. Xiang Shaolong already knew that Li Chuangwen would not let the matter drop so easily, and also knew he coveted the the seal of state and other items that he mentioned just now. With a cold laugh, he made a hand signal.

At this moment, the Li mansion soldiers on both sides have already started closing in on them.

Wu Shu and the rest immediately drew out the long staves from the bottom of the horse carriage and quickly tossed them to all the men.

Li Chuanwen finally felt that something was wrong, and gave a big shout, "Attack!"

Xiang Shaolong, who had long been grasping his big staff, threw off his outer robe and exposed the warrior's outfit underneath. He jumped forward, leaping left and beating right. The enemies swords were being knocked out of their hands. In the midst of miserable cries, the encircling soldiers were counter-attacked by the guardians. One by one the enemy soldiers fell in the boiling confusion. Breaking arms and legs sounded in quick succession.

The thousands of spectators had the 'robbing the rich to give to the poor' mentality and had always hated the evil Li Chuangwen, fueling the momentum of Xiang Shaolong's party.

This group of enemy warriors had been cloistered and coddled all along. There was an unbridgeable gap between their battle ability and that of Xiang Shaolong and his guardians. In addition, the latter were able to exploit the heavy staves' one tactical advantage, which was their length. Even though the enemy outnumbered them more than ten to one, the former could not react to the swift attacks and were utterly defeated.



After Xiang Shaolong and the guardians knocked down the seventy odd enemy soldiers in the field with their 'swifter than thunderbolt' methods, they regrouped and attacked up the stairs towards Li Chuangwen and his remaining hundred over soldiers.

Li Chuangwen could not imagine how formidable his attackers were and hysterically brandished his long sword while desperately ordering his underlings to rush forward to hinder the enemy.

Xiang Shaolong was like a tiger that had been let out of its cage. He was stepping on the enemies groaning on the ground and annihilating those remaining with his staff. He even sent two people flying more than ten feet before ascending the uppermost section of stairs.

Wu Shu and the rest of the guardians all gave a gratifying shout, beating down every enemy soldier they ran into. All who engaged them had their legs broken, falling in all four directions covered in blood. More than ten were even beaten half to death on the spot.

Xiang Shaolong flew towards Li Chuanwen like wind. One by one, all the remaining enemy warriors realized their own peril and scrambled out of his way.

Li Chuangwen was greatly alarmed by the situation and retreated into the inner mansion under the protection of ten over of his household commanders.

As Xiang Shaolong kicked down another person, he rushed into the main hall of the mansion, man and staff as one moving like a tornado.

Outside the mansion lay more than a hundred fallen Li mansion soldiers.

When Li Chuangwen finally turned around, Xiang Shaolong, Wu Shu, Wu Guang, Jing Qi and the others had already arrived like his shadow. With an imposing air like the rainbow, they beat down the panicking soldiers in front of Li Chuangwen as if they were chopping melons and dicing vegetables.

Li Chuangwen stood on the spot staring blankly, and while still grasping his long sword, he did not know how to respond and could not help but abandon his resistance.

Xiang Shaolong withdrew his staff, stood back and smiled, saying, "It appears you are not only a madman, but also a cowardly man!"

Li Chuangwen's expression flitted back and forth, but eventually sheathed his sword and harshly retorted, "I am great Chu's magistrate, if you dare to touch one of my hairs....."

Before he had finished speaking, Xiang Shaolong made a hand signal and two wooden staves heavily struck his calf bone, producing the sound of breaking bones. Li Chuangwen fell to the ground miserably.

Xiang Shaolong then ordered, "Throw all the wild thieves who are occupying my Yunnan Prince's mansion out onto the streets."

All the guardians acknowledged with a loud shout.

## CHAPTER 12

## The Revival Of Prestige

[Translated by YEONGWEE]

THE events that unfolded after the recovery of the Dian King's Mansion totally exceeded the expectations of Xiang Shaolong and the rest. The first to arrive and congratulate them was Lord Chunshen, followed by the maids, servants and warriors of the Dian King's Mansion who had been recently expelled. They were then followed by the representatives and even kings of each vassal state who had come for King Xiaolie's funeral, the envoys of each of the Eastern states, and finally the famous generals and

chancellors who had esteemed the Zhuang family all along. This kept Madam Zhuang and Xiang Shaolong busy with incessant receptions and parties.

At dusk, the Empress Dowager Li Yanyan summoned Madam Zhuang and Zhuang Baoyi, but did not include Xiang Shalolong. Xiang Shaolong knew that he had been successful in raising the power and prestige of the Zhuang family. With ease of mind, he left Madam Zhuang the mother and son under the escort of Lord Chunshen to enter the palace for the meeting with Li Yanyan and her two plus year-old crown prince. Fortunately, the two You sisters remained to receive and entertain the guests, reducing the chances for a slip-up on his part. As they were beginning to get dizzy and confused with the volume of guests, a servant announced, "Lord Longyang from Wei seeks an audience!"

Xiang Shaolong was delighted and after exhorting the You sisters to continue entertaining the other guests, instructed the servant to usher Lord Longyang into the inner hall.

Lord Longyang was puzzled at this arrangement and could only stare blankly on seeing Xiang Shaolong once he arrived inside. Xiang Shaolong rose from his seat and welcomed him, saying, "This time I have fooled you again!"

Lord Longyang could not believe it and widened his 'graceful eyes', and in a small voice said, "Xiang Shaolong!"

Xiang Shaolong pulled him to a seat in a corner and laughed, saying, "Who else could it be?"

Lord Longyang delightedly said, "You know that Tian Dan has arrived here!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled and nodded.

Lord Longyang sighed and said, "You have the ability to know everything about heaven and earth. The last time it was Dong Horse Fanatic, now it is Wan Ruiguang. You've caused me to be worried for you. When I arrived here three days ago to discover Tian Dan flaunting himself spiritedly, I thought you had been killed by him!"

Xiang Shaolong then explained everything, not knowing why he trusts this 'boyfriend' wholeheartedly. Lord Longyang is finally aware of Tian Dan's escape using a body double. In a flash of realization, he said, "No wonder the Liu brothers, Dan Chu and the others have all disappeared. I must say, though, you can be proud of yourself, having caused him to be so frightened as to slip away so ignominiously!"

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is the Lord here to attend King Xiaolie's funeral?"

Lord Longyang replied, "Of course it is so on the the surface, but in reality I hope to wrest the Chu people from Tian Dan's hands. We now know that Tian Dan, Li Yuan and Lu Buwei have made a secret pact to divide the whole world between themselves."

Xiang Shaolong said, "If the Lord helps me to kill Tian Dan, wouldn't it solve all problems?"

Lord Longyang thought that this was reasonable, and nodding, he said, "If you can restore the crown prince of Dian to his throne, you will teach the Chu people to think twice about having malicious intents. Though the situation is so complicated! Eventually we will still need to deal with your Qin state, isn't this a great contradiction?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "That is a problem for the future. If we do not deal with Lu Buwei's plot, we will face immediate catastrophe. Therefore killing Tian Dan will definitely be beneficial for you and for me.

Lord Longyang forced a bitter smile and said, "I am afraid that under heaven, there is only one Xiang Shaolong that I cannot refuse. Soon you will be seeing a lot of old friends too!"

Xiang Shaolong said, "That's got to be Han Chuang, right?"

Lord Longyang said, "This person Han Chuang is not very reliable, it's better not to reveal yourself to him, else he might betray you under certain circumstances."

Xiang Shaolong then asked about Zhao Ya. Lord Longyang said, "She has already followed your family members back to Xianyang. The crown prince has expended a lot of effort to do this because all along, Han Jing was not willing to let her go. Once women get jealous, they disregard the bigger picture."

This was a big weight off Xiang Shaolong's mind. Following up, he asked, "Who else is here from each country?"

Lord Longyang counted on his fingers and replied, "From Zhao, it is Guo Kai. This guy is now highly favored. With him messing around, I think Lian Po will soon lose his position."

Xiang Shaolong knew that for him to be so certain, there must have been some affair behind in his words. He couldn't help but give a gloomy sigh, but his hands were tied.

Lord Longyang continued, "From Wei, it should be Prince Dan. Nonetheless it is certainly odd that to date there has been no news of him."

Xiang Shaolong was also unable to figure this out. If Prince Dan's men had sent news using swift horses from the Wei border to Shouchun, they would have arrived seventy days before he did. There was no reason for the lack of news.

All the envoys had to make official correspondence before arriving. If there was as yet no news of Prince Dan, it was possible that he would not be able to arrive in time for the funeral in half a month.

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Did Qin send anyone?"

Lord Longyang replied, "Qin has always had a close relationship with Chu, not to mention that it was a rare time of peace, of course they will send someone. The odd thing, however, is that the person sent is not Lu Buwei, but Premier Xu Xian."

Xiang Shaolong's heart was jolted, with a faint feeling of unease.



Lord Longyang was astounded and said, "Is there any problem? Why did Shaolong's expression turn so ugly?"

Xiang Shaolong relied, "I do not yet know what is the problem. Could the Lord do me a favor? Find out which route Xu Xian is taking to Shouchun. This is an urgent matter."

Lord Longyang understood immediately and his color began to change, saying, "I will dispatch people to do this immediately. If they are passing through my Great Wei, I will send soldiers to protect him. Humph! This could be a plot to implicate my Great Wei."

Xiang Shaolong hadn't thought of this point. It did not matter whether Xu Xian chose to go through Han or Wei, if Lu Buwei caused him to be assassinated in either country, a tempest would ensue. Lu Buwei could then send the Army to attack Han or Wei.

He did not think that Lu Buwei would remain so formidable after Mo Ao died.

Both men no longer had the mood to talk, and Lord Longyang left in a hurry.

It was dark by the time they had sent off all the guests.

Xiang Shaolong was so hungry that his stomach growled and he hurriedly returned to the courtyard of his residence. The two ladies Ji and Zhao had just had a bath and were waiting for him to come in for dinner.

The Dian King's Mansion was medium sized and composed of a master house with six courtyard houses surrounded by high walls.

Each courtyard house was composed of houses in a square with a courtyard in the middle. It was an inward looking design, with practically all doors and windows opening into the courtyard. There were trees planted all over the houses such that even though the hot summer was approaching, it was still very cool and shady.

The exits were all designed to face South, and the houses were symmetrical left and right with an obvious central axis.

The main buildings faced the main entrance, with wings left and right.

Xiang Shaolong and the guardians occupied two of the courtyard houses. The place was spacious and wide yet cozy and snug and gave one the feeling of having returned home.

After Xiang Shaolong had had his fill, he heaved a sigh and started relating his conversation with Lord Longyang and his worries about Xu Xian. After listening, Ji Yanran was speechless.

Zhao Zhi said, "Premier Xu is one of Western Qin's two big 'Tiger Generals'. He should be able to defend himself!"

Ji Yanran said, "The most worrisome thing is if there are Lu Buwei's spies amongst his men. Premier Xu will least expect the attackers to be soldiers that Li Yuan has hidden on the borders of Han and Wei. That is a dangerous situation."

She knitted her eyebrows again, saying, "Although Qin and Chu have a close relationship, sending someone from the king's clan would have been more appropriate. There has got to be a reason for this."

Xiang Shaolong said, "It is easy to find some political pretext like having to sign a peace treaty with Chu to force Xu Xian to come. Even though the Empress Dowager's dissatisfaction with Lu Buwei is increasing steadily, it is difficult to rely on this discredited person to do anything. This is because the Qin military has always looked down on this Empress Dowager."

Ji Yanyan has the utmost respect for Xu Xian, and worriedly sighed, saying, "At this point we can only resign ourselves to heaven's will!"

At this moment, Zhuang Kong came over with an invitation, saying that Madam Zhuang had returned and would like to speak to him in person.

Xiang Shaolong could only control his feelings and follow Zhuang Kong out.

Madam Zhuang is wearing a 'Swallow Tail Coat'. The long coat-tail of the garment is cut in a triangular shape and folded over, simulating a swallow's tail, hence its name.

She is reclining on a couch beside a louvered window at the central courtyard. She was in high-spirits as she watched Xiang Shaolong enter. Her fine hair was drawn in a weighted bun and fastened with a golden hairpin which shimmered

under the lamplight, accentuating her grandeur, grace and allure.

Her waist was girded with a strand of distinctly shaped jade ornaments, increasing the magnificence and prosperity befitting her status as a noblewoman.

After Zhuang Kong left, Madam Zhuang stood up and moved in front of Xiang Shaolong's. Smiling sweetly, she said, "Your servant came back a long time ago, but wanted to take a bath and change her clothes before meeting you. Can you smell the bath fragrance on my body?"

Saying that, she proudly stuck out her silky bosom. Xiang Shaolong figured that the women from the Tu clan of Southern Dian were especially liberal, straightforwardly and brazenly luring men. He also figured, though, that this was also her way of thanking him. He laughed faintly, "Seeing Madam's demeanor, one can tell that this trip to the Chu palace reaped a good result, is your servant wrong?"

Madam Zhuang raised her pair of jade-like hands and pressed them against the pit of her stomach, and smiling enchantingly, said, "Shaolong, your pulse is racing."

As Xiang Shaolong was beginning to feel embarrassed, Madam Zhuang released her hands and glided towards the window in a movingly graceful and delicate step. With her back to him, she glazed at the moonlit courtyard, and gently said, "Xiang Shaolong truly enjoys a well-deserved reputation. With just one dazzling move, you have shaken the entire Shouchun. Now nobody dares to look down on us

few stateless women and children. All the vassal states have made clear their position, supporting our return to our country. The only obstacle is actually the Chu court."

Xiang Shaolong had to make a move in the five steps it took for him to walk behind her. He asked, "How was Li Yanyan's attitude towards you?"

Madam Zhuang replied, "I assumed initially that Li Yanyan would be a very formidable person, but besides being beyond my expectations, she merely came across as a gentle and emotional person, even hinting at some unspeakable grief and sadness. She is of course a rare beauty, even being comparable with your Talented Lady Ji. What surprised me the most, though, was that she was closer to Lord Chunshen than Li Yuan. This is truly difficult to understand."

Xiang Shaolong was dazed as he heard this. Could Li Yanyan be such a pitiful character? Madam Zhuang turned around and leaned against the window. The corners of her mouth broke into an enchanting smile, with the tips of her eyebrows and the corners of her eyes exuding limitless charm. With both shoulders rising lightly, she said, "Li Yuan and Lord Chunshen are both interested in your servant's body. What should your servant do?"

Xiang Shaolong forced a smile and said, "What does Madam want me to say?"

Madam Zhuang laughed in distress, saying, "I have seen the likes of such men countless times. If your servant had not fallen for you, in order to secure their support, she would

not have been miserly with her body. Now instead, she feels like seeking your opinion first. Under heaven, there is no one else able to gain your servant's confidence."

As Xiang Shaolong was considering whether she was trying to confuse him, Madam Zhuang took a step toward him and pasted her body into his bosom and embraced his waist with all her strength, her pert face buried in his broad shoulders. She moaned, "Embrace me, ok? I need a big strong man to support me."

He would be lying if he said he wasn't moved under such a circumstance, when such a noble, lovable and charming rarity threw herself into his arms. Xiang Shaolong could not help but embrace her firmly and caressing her well rounded and elastic back muscles, gently said, "Madam does not need to do this. Even if we do not have a physical relationship, I, Xiang Shaolong, will never break a promise. I am determined to help the young crown prince ascend the throne.

Madam Zhuang looked up and smiled sweetly, saying, "Do you think your servant treats you like other men? No! You are wrong! I saw you in a dream last night. Ai! Its a pity that our fling of passion will have to end once my son ascends the throne. When I think of this I can't help feeling that there is no more joy in this life."

She suddenly left his embrace and pulled him to a seat beside her. Her expression turned solemn and she said, "Li Yanyan has verified the legitimacy of me and my son's

status, but Li Yuan is using the excuse of pressure from a strong Qin to avoid sending troops to assist us mother and son. I do not know if Lord Chunshen is afraid of offending the Li clan, but he is vague and indecisive. Every other party's verbal support is just that. They are unlikely to lend substantial assistance. Our fate hence lies in Shaolong's hands.

To comfort her, Shaolong softly said, "I have a large and powerful army at the Qin-Chu border. At the appropriate time they can dress up as Dian people and invade the Dian capital. If I manage to kill Tian Dan, though, I will need to slip away immediately, else it will be difficult for me to leave Shouchun. At this point, the only way for Li Yuan to deal with you is to keep you under house arrest in the Chu capital. This way, he will also be able to play with your body, killing two birds with one stone."

Madam Zhuang's countenance changed, saying, "I haven't considered this problem."

Xiang Shaolong couldn't help hugging her shoulders, and softly said, "The most critical thing for you to do now is to look like a 'damsel in distress'. Might as well play along with Li Yuan and Lord Chunshen, pretending that you will be helpless if the Chu court does not send troops. You will be able to fool everyone this way."

Madam Zhuang nibbled her lip and said, "Are you suggesting that I should sacrifice my body? I was originally set on this

course of action, but with you around, I no longer feel like doing it."

Xiang Shaolong discerned that her feelings for him were genuine, and since he is used to philandering, couldn't help but kiss her cheek, gently saying, "What is easily obtained is not treasured. You must be ambiguous with those who have designs on you, periodically leading them on and periodically resisting them. By the time their passions boil over, we would have left the Chu capital long ago. If I cannot kill Tian Dan before the Chu king's funeral, I will have no choice but to give up and wholeheartedly help you return to your country."

Madam Zhuang had an intoxicated expression, and said in a muffled voice, "The more I interact with you, the more I realize how fearsome and formidable you are. Yet you are also a passionate and righteous hero. This is such a contradiction. Shaolong..... Ah! I have fallen into your hands so easily, do you despise me?"

Xiang Shaolong thought, I have yet to enter the room and mount the couch, how does this count 'as falling into my hands'? Of course he could not actually say that, and so he softly said, "Before the crown prince returns home, we cannot have a physical relationship. That will cause us to wallow in an ocean of lust, causing us to neglect the important matters. We must 'endure hardship to accomplish our ambitions'. Only by working assiduously and whetting ourselves, can we succeed in this great cause."



Madam Zhuang almost moaned, "You have beautiful women in your house, how can that be called 'enduring hardship'? Using this to describe me is just about right. Shaolong ah! Wu....."

Xiang Shaolong gave her fragrant lips a lingering kiss, saying, "If a woman is sexually satisfied, she will show it in her expression, and philandering old hands like Li Yuan and Lord Chunshen are sure to notice. It will then be hard for Madam to play her tricks with them. This is an extremely subtle matter. Madam must listen to what I say."

Madam Zhuang came to her senses, straightened her body and said, "Your servant understands, but please do not forget your promise. When the matter of returning to our country is accomplished, I will not let you go."

Xiang Shaolong gave her another lingering kiss, then left for his own courtyard, intensely wishing for Ji Yanran the two ladies. Only they can appease the lust that this outstandingly foxy and amorous woman has stirred up in him. In this dangerous place where life and death hangs on a hair, he did not wish for anything to affect his grand plan, and that includes male-female relationships.

If he is not able to kill Tian Dan in the next fifteen days, he will slip away immediately and without the slightest hesitation.

As important as killing Tian Dan is, it cannot compare to the lives of Ji and Zhao the two ladies and the guardians, not to mention his family members Wu Tingfang and Xiang Bao'er,

and the tragic Zhao Ya who was bitterly awaiting him at his home.

It is only now that he understands the meaning of the saying 'Heros have it difficult'.

## CHAPTER 13

## History Repeats Itself

[Translated by YEONGWEE]

THE 'Keng Qiang' sound resonated without pause.

Xiang Shaolong, Ji Yanran, Zhao Zhi and the guardians together with the You sisters watched the Dian Prince Zhuang Baoyi quite credibly exchanging sword moves with Jing Shan.

Of course all the ladies were cheering for this child. Jing Shan relied on his agility, defending but not attacking.

"Dang!"

In the end, Zhuang Baoyi was still small and weak, and the sword fell on the ground as he lost his grip momentarily.

He was however not discouraged and rolled on the ground, picked up his sword and continued fighting.

Xiang Shaolong secretly praised him, and called for a halt to the exercise. After imparting some basic skills for him to self-drill, he approached the You sisters for his make-up. Ji Yanran and the rest also retreated to the inner hall to avoid being spotted for their exceptional looks.

Having witnessed his godly exhibition the day before, the You sisters adored him even more. With fiery passions rising, it was fortunate that Xiang Shaolong had just fought a great battle with Ji Yanran and Zhao Zhi the previous night, and was simply willing but unable, else something might have slipped.

Xiang Shaolong had undergone strict military training so he understood that during a critical time of operations, too much licentious behavior brought mind and body much harm and little benefit.

The two ladies also understood Xiang Shaolong's difficulties from Madam Zhuang, and merely hinted at him with their usual affectionate chatter.

Once they had finished with the make-up, the two ladies were unwilling to let him go and compelled him to lie on the couch while they gave him a Chinese style massage.

After a few strokes, he became so comfortable and relaxed that he fell asleep.

When he awoke, the two ladies were on either side massaging his feet, causing him to feel as if he was floating in the clouds. It was an out of this world feeling.

Youcui laughed and said, "Did you sleep well?"

Younging then said, "Lord Longyang came to look for you. He's been waiting outside for a good fifteen minutes."

Xiang Shaolong was startled and sat up, saying, "Why didn't you wake me?"

Youcui then came over and helped him put his clothes on, and said with a voice as tender and soft as water, "We couldn't bear to do it! When Xiang Sir takes his bath tonight, we will give you another massage!"

Xiang Shaolong has gotten used to their meticulous and unfettered serving spirit, for which they even put aside all propriety between men and women. Nodding his head, he requested to get up.

Younging pulled at his sleeve and said plaintively, "Isn't Xiang Sir going to give us sisters a little reward?"

Xiang Shaolong thought about how men in this era went about freely playing with beautiful women, and decided to go with the flow. Unable to resist the temptation, he gave both both of them a deep kiss before stumbling out to meet Lord Longyang.

Perhaps it was because he was meeting Xiang Shaolong today, this beautiful man's face had a special glow. After he had sat down, accepted some fragrant tea from a servant and taken a few sips, Lord Longyang said, "This matter with Tian Dan is particularly thorny. Tian Dan is now residing in the Chu palace with Li Yuan as his neighbor. He is thus very well defended. In my opinion, unless we are able to know when he leaves the palace, we are unable to assassinate him."

Xiang Shaolong felt a headache coming and said, "Is there any way to create a map of the imperial palace?"

Lord Longyang said awkwardly, "It could be possible with a little more time, but in my opinion, Tian Dan will definitely rush back to Qi right after King Xiaolie's funeral..... Ai!"

Xiang Shaolong asked, "What kind of defences does the Chu palace have?"

Lord Longyang replied, "I'm not too clear about this, but matters will be difficult even with just the moat, the high walls and the sentry post, much less with the fact that we do not know where in the palace Tian Dan is residing.

Xiang Shaolong said, "All large aristocratic residences will have a secret passageway for escape....."

Lord Longyang interrupted, "You can stop thinking about this possibility. Even with our Wei Palace, there are people round the clock monitoring the ground for the sound of human activity. Else, wouldn't all the officials lose their lives once someone digs a tunnel into the palace?"

Xiang Shaolong said, "Doesn't Tian Dan need to attend banquets? If we know when he is going to which meeting, can't we assassinate him en route?"

Lord Longyang said disappointingly, "Even though the Chu people have been labeled as Southern barbarians, they abide by customs even more strictly than us people from the Northern states. All banquets and festivities have been forbidden before the Chu king's funeral. This tactic will get you nowhere."

Xiang Shaolong was extremely vexed, and said, "Is there anyone at all who is able to lure Tian Dan out of the palace? Ai! As long as we know where in the palace Tian Dan is staying, we may yet have a method."

At this moment he is thinking of how he used the sewers to infiltrate Zhao Mu's residence. The Chu Palace is much bigger though, and he does not have an answer for that. It was also unclear how convenient or suitable the Chu Palace's sewers were, therefore he had to admit that this method was unlikely to work.

Lord Longyang suddenly lowered his voice and said, "Is that Dian Princess very beautiful?"

Xiang Shaolong replied curiously, "She is certainly extraordinarily moving. Could it be that the Lord....."

Lord Longyang's 'pretty face' turned red, saying, "Please do not misunderstand. When I was at Lord Chunshen's residence last night, Li Yuan and Lord Chunshen were both praising the Dian Princess, saying that such a foxy and

charming woman as her was rarer than one in ten thousand. At that time Tian Dan, Han Chuang and Guo Kai were all present. They were all moved. That is why I thought maybe the Dian Princess would be able to lure Tian Dan into our trap! Nonetheless it is still difficult to come up with a concrete and practical plan."

Xiang Shalong said, "Did they talk about me?"

Lord Longyang flashed him a look and said, "How could I have leaked your secret? They were equally amazed at your skill, determination and movements. Only, no matter how much they crack their heads, there is no way they will associate you with Xiang Shaolong. Even your servant could not recognize you, the others can forget about it."

Because Xiang Shaolong thought of Lord Longyang as at least half a woman, and also because of their profound friendship, no matter how lasciviously Lord Longyang acted, he felt amiable friendship rather than disgust.

Laughing, he asked, "When Li Yuan talked about Wan Ruiguang, did he display any rage?"

Lord Longyang replied, "On the contrary, he did not. In my opinion, there is a fierce internecine power struggle within the Li clan. Last night, Li Yuan actually rained curses on Li Chuangwen's ignorance, saying it served him right to have both his legs broken."

Xiang Shaolong asked in confusion, "How was Lord Chunshen and Li Yuan's relationship?"



Lord Longyang replied, "It was very good. When Li Yuan meets Lord Chunshen, its like when a mouse meets a cat, being excessively deferential and ingratiating. I think Li Yuan must have some plan to deal with Lord Chunshen, if not he would not need to prostrate himself so."

Lord Longyang continued, "Have you seen Li Yanyan? I think besides the Talented Lady Ji, there is none more beautiful and delicate. Nonetheless, her brows and eyes speak of an interminable sorrow, causing one's heart to ache on her behalf."

Xiang Shaolong laughed bitterly, "Its a pity that she has no intention of meeting me. Otherwise I would be able to validate the Lord's impressions."

Lord Longyang muttered to himself irresolutely for a while, then said, "I sent people to investigate the whereabouts of Xu Xian, but I am afraid we were late by one step, causing me to be extremely worried."

Xiang Shaolong lightly patted his shoulder, saying, "Do not worry. As long as I, Xiang Shaolong, am around, Qin soldiers will not invade Wei's borders."

Lord Longyang celebrated and said, "I will trust you with this matter then."

The two of them discussed a little more, only to discover that there and then it was difficult to think of a way to assassinate Tian Dan. Lord Longyang then left for a prior appointment.

Just as Lord Longyang had left, Li Yuan and Lord Chunshen arrived together.

Xiang Shaolong naturally let Madam Zhuang deal with them, but before he could return to Ji and Zhao the two ladies' courtyard, Zhuang Kong came to invite him to the main building to meet the guests. He could only brace himself and go.

As he raised his foot to walk into the main hall, he deliberately altered his gait and posture. He walked directly towards Madam Zhuang, Lord Chunshen and Li Yuan who were seated in a host versus guest arrangement. The hall was surrounded by the two men's personal guards.

As Lord Longyang expected, Li Yuan did not once suspect the Wan Ruiguang who was standing there and greeting him. Lord Chunshen acted according to his status and sat coolly.

Li Yuan greeted and said, "General Wan is indeed an extraordinary person. It is no wonder that the moment you stepped into Shouchun, you have become a household name."

After Xiang Shaolong returned the courtesy, he used his modified voice with the thick Dian accent and speaking in the Zhou language, and said, "Compared with the Lord and Imperial Uncle, I, Wan Ruiguang is only fit to be some small seat-bearing manservant! Imperial Uncle is too polite."

Madam Zhuang, seeing that Li Yuan was totally unsuspecting, let go of her worries and happily said,

"Imperial Uncle's visit to our home today is precisely to meet you Ruiguang!"

Xiang Shaolong secretly mused that the two of them were really just looking for an excuse to look for you the woman who is rarer than one in ten thousand. The smiling Li Yuan who was sitting on her left lowered his head.

After gazing deeply at Madam Zhuang, Li Yuan turned his head and said to Xiang Shaolong, "General Wan is a famous general from Southern Dian, does he have a grand plan to reclaim his country?"

Xiang Shaolong was paying attention to Madam Zhuang's motions. He saw that when Li Yuan was looking at her, she became subconsciously frenetic and lowered her gaze. He exclaimed mentally, knowing that Li Yuan was using his bright and handsome appearance, charming style of conversation and elegant demeanor to confuse Madam Zhuang's heart. That is why she is behaving so abnormally.

He replied directly, "This is precisely our objective for coming to Shouchun. If the King could divert a group of horses and men under the small official's command, there is hope that we can defeat the thief in one move and recapture the Dian land.

Lord Chunshen coughed drily, saying, "This matter needs further deliberation. Since the late King is newly deceased and the Crown Prince (of Chu) is still young, everything should be decided after the funeral. I hope that Princess and Mister Wan is able to appreciate the circumstances."

Just as Xiang Shaolong was musing that things were going well, he saw Li Yuan once again using his meaningful glances to provoke Madam Zhuang, but Lord Chunshen did not notice this.

Li Yuan revealed a smile that even Xiang Shaolong had to admit was good-looking, and gently said, "The Empress Dowager treated the Dian Princess with familiarity at first sight. Whats more, she is now a little distressed in anticipation of the late King's funeral. Let me invite Princess and little Crown Prince (of Dian) to the palace to stay for a few days and let us show our hospitality as hosts.

Xiang Shaolong was startled and gave a silent cry of warning.

Once Madam Zhuang and Zhuang Baoyi enter the palace, they would no longer be able to step out freely. Moreover, with Li Yuan's ploy, as Madam Zhuang has not been 'cultivated' for a long time, obtaining her body would take little effort. When that happens, the consequences would be difficult to predict.

He busily tried signaling to Madam Zhuang with his eyes.

Madam Zhuang lowered her head in understanding and dimly said, "I appreciate Empress Dowager's kind feelings. I am but a person who has lost her country. It is difficult to extinguish the constant worry I have about the Dian restoration. How would I dare to serve the Empress Dowager with my worried countenance? Hope that Imperial Uncle can convey my difficulties to the Empress Dowager."

Li Yuan stopped talking immediately, merely nodding his head slightly in agreement.

Lord Chunshen was also trying to push his agenda with Madam Zhuang, and gently said, "Princess should come over to my place for a couple of days so as to avoid staying in this place of mixed memories. Once the late King has been put to rest and affairs return to normal, this Lord will use all his strength to support the little Crown Prince (of Dian)'s restoration to the throne."

Madam Zhuang naturally understood the meaning behind Lord Chunshen's words. Remembering what Xiang Shaolong said about periodically leading on and periodically resisting, she first flashed Lord Chunshen a coquettish look, and then hung her head and lightly said, "After the funeral period, ok? Your servant suffered a minor illness on the way and have yet to recover up to today. She hopes to rest a few more days. Lets discuss this again after she recovers."

Seeing her pitiful appearance and thinking about last night's kiss, even Xiang Shaolong's brain became feverish. Lord Chunshen and Li Yuan each showed an expression of 'communicating with loving glances'.

A beautiful woman's charm is irresistible to men.

Especially a beauty who has yet to be caught in one's hands.

Li Yuan appeared to be deeply concerned and said, "I will find the palace's best doctor to come and look at Madam's illness!"

Madam Zhuang could't decline and could only give her thanks.

Lord Chunshen and Li Yuan could not find any other excuse to remain and could only stand up and leave.

Just as Xiang Shaolong was heaving a sigh of relief, Li Yuan warmly pulled his sleeve and said, "I have yet to have a proper chat with General Wan. Why don't you have a simple meal at my home!"

Xiang Shaolong was happy on the one hand but alarmed on the other. The happy thing was of course having the opportunity to go into the palace. The alarming thing was that without Madam Zhuang around to look after him, he could accident give the game away. Nonetheless however he feels, it would be difficult for him to get away from this.

Its just that he did not understand why Li Yuan would want to win him over.

Xiang Shaolong and Li Yuan got into the latter's horse carriage while Lord Chunshen returned to his home on his own.

Li Yuan smiled slightly and asked, "Regarding Brother Wan's matter of reclaiming his country, what is his estimation?"

Xiang Shaolong forced a smile and said, "During the Dian rebellion, only a handful of us from the Zhuang family and the Wan family were able to escape. Even though all the peoples of Dian wish for our return, Li Ling has the support

of the Yelang people, hence our chance of success without external help is small."

Li Yuan ferociously said, "I have long despised this Li Ling person. Though we are clansmen, we share no affection at all. After stealing the country for himself, he raised an army and occupied land all around, clearly a man with the wild ambition of wolves. It is nonetheless difficult to expect the Empress Dowager to agree to dispatch a large army. Dian is just too far away. If we cannot capture the Dian capital in one move and the fighting is prolonged, things will be chaotic and Qin will seize the opportunity to invade. That would be extremely unfavorable to my Great Chu."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly realized that there were at least two factions in the Li clan, and that Dou Jie and Cheng Suning were supporting Li Ling's faction.

Because Li Yuan could not reliably influence his younger sister Li Yanyan, it was clear that Li Yanyan would follow the imperial decrees that King Xiaolie left behind, intending to use Li Ling to subdue the vassal state, once again making it a part of Chu's territory.

Li Yuan has nonetheless seen through Li Ling's wild ambitions, and knows that Li Ling just wants to grow his own power. This is a menace to Li Yuan.

The situation could be even more complicated, but this would be beyond Xiang Shaolong's field of view.

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to understand that what's on the surface and what's underneath and reality are completely different.

Li Yuan noticed Xiang Shaolong's dumbstruck look, but mistook it for dejection at the diminishing chances for him to reclaim his country. He grabbed Xiang Shaolong's shoulders, and putting on an earnest expression, said, "Brother Wan may not believe what I am going to say, but the one most opposed to sending troops to Dian is Lord Chunshen Huang Xie."

Xiang Shaolong almost lost his voice, and exclaimed, "What?"

Li Yuan replied, "That is why I said that it would be difficult for Brother Wan to believe. The circumstances now are very different. The vassal states have amassed armies and are now more self-assured. Imperial decrees are hard to pass. They are also beyond the reach of the court, and are hard to suppress by force. That is why Lord Chunshen opposes the restoration of your country."

Xiang Shaolong forced a smile and said, "Imperial Uncle is really forthright."

Li Yuan said, "However, I have a completely different viewpoint. The vassal states' rise is already fait accompli. To continue subverting them merely adds to the chaos and confusion, producing little results for much work. Worse, we will nurture even more new powers like Li Ling. That is why I have always fully supported your reclamation of Dian."



Xiang Shaolong actually believed his words.

This was because it was Lord Chunshen's lackey Fang Zhuo who actually leaked the news of Madam Zhuang mother and son's present Shouchun trip to Cheng Suning. It was hard to believe that Fang Zhuo would benefit from this if Lord Chunshen had not orchestrated the whole thing.

Lord Chunshen is playing the good guy on the surface, but is actually hamstringing the Zhuang family in the dark.

Politics is dirty after all.

Li Yuan is also not a saint, but is merely doing it for himself, since it appears that Li Yanyan is presently closer to Lord Chunshen. There are even people in the Li clan who are standing on Lord Chunshen's side, causing Li Yuan to feel extremely threatened. A further reason could be that he saw that Wan Ruiguang was perceptive and valiant, and wanted to rope him in to his side. He is sure to have an even more formidable plot in the background to deal with himself.

Xiang Shaolong hardened his heart and said, "Actually I do not doubt Imperial Uncle's words. This is because we were almost harmed by villains on the way here."

He then related the entire account of how Chen Suning disguised his men as boatmen to sink their ship.

Li Yuan said happily, "In that case I can save my breath. If Brother Wan is willing to collaborate with me, I will guarantee the reclamation of your country. It is just a question of whether Brother Wan has the courage."

How could Xiang Shaolong not know what this was all about? He pretended to be unafraid and said, "As long as my Dian is returned, I, Wan Ruiguang will go through fire and water with no reservations."

Li Yuan lowered his voice and said, "Then you must first kill Lord Chunshen."

Xiang Shaolong immediately brought to mind the former incident where Prince Xinling asked him assassinate the Wei King. Unexpectedly, history has repeated itself again.

*[Continue to Book 4]*

## ABOUT AUTHOR

**Huang Zuqiang** (traditional Chinese, 黃祖強; born 1952), better known by his pen name **Huang Yi** (traditional Chinese, 黃易), is a Hong Kong writer of Wuxia and science fiction novels. He graduated from the Department of Fine Arts of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and once worked as the Assistant Chairperson of Hong Kong Museum of Art.



In the 1990s, after the golden age of Wuxia literature, Wuxia literature was increasingly under attack by the general public and was losing its previous aura. However, the emergence of Huang Yi infused new life into the Wuxia genre.

From *Lethal Weapons of Love and Passion* (Chinese, 覆雨翻雲) to *A Step Into The Past* (Chinese, 尋秦記) and to the now popular *Twin of Brothers* (Chinese, 大唐雙龍傳), Huang Yi has combined science fiction with traditional Chinese culture (metaphysics, philosophy, etc) to create a new style of work. Currently, his popularity has resulted in some people describing this phenomenon as flurry of Huang sweeping through China.

Upon conclusion of his longest novel, *Da Tang Shuang Long Zhuan* (*Twins of Brothers*), Huang Yi has commented that he would like to follow in the footsteps of Louis Cha and to revise and improve his released novels.

Source,  
*Wikipedia.org*

# LIST OF AUTHOR'S NOVELS

(This list is based on a list found at *shuku.net* dated **15 March 2010**)

NO	TITLE	PUBLISHER (YEAR)	REMARKS
----	-------	------------------	---------

## SERIES:

### • YI XIA

- |   |  |                      |  |
|---|--|----------------------|--|
| 1 | 大唐双龙记 (Da Tang Shuang Long Ji)<br>Twin of Brothers         |                      |  |
| 2 | 寻秦记 (Xun Qin Ji)<br>A Step Into The Past                   | Wong Yi Books (2001) |  |
| 3 | 大剑师传奇 (Da Jian Shi Chuan Qi)<br>Wanderer of the Cosmos     |                      |  |
| 4 | 星际浪子 (Xing Ji Lang Zi)                                     |                      |  |
| 5 | 荆楚争雄记 (Jing Chu Zheng Xiong Ji)                            |                      |  |
| 6 | 覆雨翻云 (Fu Yu Fan Yun)<br>Lethal Weapons of Love and Passion |                      |  |

### • LING DU YU

- |    |                          |  |  |
|----|--------------------------|--|--|
| 7  | 月魔 (Yue Mo)              |  |  |
| 8  | 上帝之谜 (Shang Di Zhi Mi)   |  |  |
| 9  | 兽性回归 (Shou Xing Hui Gui) |  |  |
| 10 | 诸神之战 (Zhu Shen Zhi Zhan) |  |  |
| 11 | 光神 (Guang Shen)          |  |  |
| 12 | 圣女 (Sheng Ru)            |  |  |
| 13 | 湖祭 (Hu Ji)               |  |  |
| 14 | 尔国临格 (Er Guo Lin Ge)     |  |  |
| 15 | 浮沉之主 (Fu Chen Zhi Zhu)   |  |  |

### • PO SUI XU KONG

16 破碎虚空 (Po Sui Xu Kong)

• XUAN HUAN

17 灵琴杀手 (Ling Qin Sha Shou)

18 超脑 (Chao Nao)

19 超级战士 (Chao Ji Zhan Shi)

20 时空浪族 (Shi Kong Lang Zu)

21 文明之秘 (Wen Ming Zhi Mi)

22 域外天魔 (Yu Wai Tian Mo)

23 幽灵船 (You Ling Chuan)

24 龙神 (Long Shen)

**NON SERIES:**

25 情约 (Qing Yao)

26 迷失的 (Mi Shi Di)

27 异灵 (Yi Ling)

28 魔女殿 ( Mo Nu Dian)

29 同归于尽 (Tong Gui Yu Jin)

30 乐王 (Yue Wang)

31 创世纪 (Chuang Shi Ji)

32 异能警察 (Yin Eng Jing Cha)

33 换天 (Huan Tian)

34 蝶梦 (Die Meng)

35 最后战士 (Zui Hou Zhan Shi)

36 故乡 (Gu Xiang)

37 惊世大预言 (Jing Shi Da Yu Yan)

38 乌金血剑 (Wu Jin Xue Jian)

39 天子传奇 (Tian Zi Chuan Qi)

40 寻鼎记 (Xun Ding Ji)

- 41 边荒传说 (Bian Huang Chuan Shuo)  
Wasteland Legend